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The Prairie Pirates.



THE PRAIRIE PIRATES;

OR,

THE HUNTER'S REVENGE.

BY GUSTAVE AIMARD.

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THE PRAIRIE FIRE
THE HUNTER'S REVENGE

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BY GUSTAVE ADARD

THE PRAIRIE FIRE
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THE PRAIRIE PIRATES; OR, THE HUNTER'S REVENGE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SURPRISE

On the banks of the Canadian River, in a charming site at the foot of a verdant hill, a strange scene was occurring in a village which had been settled but two years at most.

This village was composed of about twenty log-cabins, grouped capriciously near each other, under shelter of a fort on which four small cannons were mounted.

This village, though young yet, had already acquired all the importance of a town. Two taverns supplied the drinkers, three temples of differens sects served to unite the faithful.

Here and there the inhabitants were going and coming, with an unwonted seriousness, on their affairs. Numerous canoes dotted the river, and loaded carts and oxen were being driven along the deep-rutted roads.

Notwithstanding all this movement, or perhaps on account of it, an attentive looker-on would easily have recognized that the village was greatly troubled.

Let us state what the cause was.

A week before the period at which we view the scene, several white men and one Indian had been caught stealing horses from the *corral* of a certain old farmer named Clarkson, who dwelt in a hut with his family, composed of a mother, daughter, and sons. The thieves had been tried and tied to the whipping-post where they had received two dozen lashes on the bare back. When released they had gone off; the Mexicans, of whom there were two, venting all the oaths known to the large col-

lection in the Spanish language ; the Americans, three, a father and two sons, with an expressive silence ; the last, an Indian who swore that he would wash out in blood the stain put upon the Apaches, to which tribe he belonged. These threats had been the cause of an addition to their penalty : to wit, that they would be shot, if again found near the settlement.

Three days had passed, and the inhabitants had well-nigh forgotten the event, when at that time the incoming trappers and hunters had brought news that the Apaches were preparing for an expedition, no doubt against the settlement. On the next, three days, tidings kept pouring in, and the hunters in the village had left the place, going up or down the river, evidently desirous of trying some new hunting-grounds where they would be unmolested by the Indians.

The woodsmen who dwelt in the village made shorter and quicker hunts, and had, at the time on which we take up our tale, staid in the town ; one party alone, comprising the uncle and sons of whom we have spoken, with a faithful Indian, were still out on an expedition.

After the above necessary explanations, we take again the thread of our story.

The inhabitants were questioning each other, and assembling around the captain of the fort, who, with them, was hearkening to the reports of the scouts, who, whether from ill-understanding their duty, or from being unaccustomed to Indian stratagems, had, by their reports, led a deceitful confidence to lull the settlers' fears.

About a mile from the village, concealed amid the interwoven trees of a forest, whose foremost ones had fallen before the pioneers' axes, two hundred Indian warriors of the tribe of the Apaches, headed by many renowned chiefs, among whom were the whites who had been whipped, were waiting, with that savage patience which nothing can arouse, the propitious moment to deal a blow of vengeance for the insult which had been shown them, for the Indian horse-stealer was the brother of *Stanapat*, (the Hand full of Blood), the head chief of the Apache tribe, who was leading this expedition.

Many hours passed on, while the Indians like bronze statues waited, without evincing the least impatience.

At eleven o'clock, when the moon rose, the barking of a dog came to the ears of the savages.

Stanapat then rose from the blanket which he had been seated upon, and stood erect, presenting one of the most perfect

Indian forms to be met with on the prairies. Throwing the blanket on his shoulders, he commenced to move away towards the village. On the border of the clearing, he stopped.

After flinging an inquisitive glance around him, he imitated the neighing of a horse with such exactness that two horses in the village gave answer.

A few seconds more passed, when a man, (a half-breed whom we might have seen mingling among the settlers,) joined him. An ominous smile raised the corners of his lips.

'The whites are where?' asked the chief.

'They sleep,' returned the half-breed.

'Does my brother give them up?'

'All the settlers shall be put between the hands of my brother.'

'Good! are all there?'

'No. Some have gone up the river, others down. One hunting party has not returned.'

'It will come too late.'

'Probably.'

'What more has my brother to say?'

'Where is what I asked of the chief?' said the half-breed.

'The skins, guns, and powder are with my young men.'

'I trust in you, chief, but if you deceive me—'

'An Indian has but one word.'

'Good!'

Ten minutes afterwards, the Indians were masters of this village, of whose inhabitants not one was spared.

The fort was surrounded by the Apaches, and the weak points of the building were pointed out by the renegade whites, who had shown more thirst for blood than the most cruel savage.

Boards and furniture from the houses were heaped at the walls, up which the Indians sprang at their chiefs' signal, uttering together their horrid war-whoop.

In a moment more, the people in the fort, awoke so suddenly by the war-cry, leaped from their beds, and joined the captain, who was already posting his men with that reckless bravery which characterizes the Yankees.

Though sure that all hope of saving themselves was lost, the captain and his men determined to die honorably.

With one combined rush, the Americans drove the Indians back to the very edge of the roof of the block-house, while two of the small cannons were loaded and made ready.

The first persons whom the captain perceived were the half-breed who had sold the village, and by him the Indian who had been whipped.

'Ah, ah,' muttered the officer to himself, 'I am at no loss to account for this surprise.'

Drawing a pistol from his belt, he clutched the half-breed by the throat, crying :

'So you have sold us to your brothers, the redskins !'

The half-breed only smiled.

'But your treason will do you no good, miscreant,' said the captain, 'for you fall the first victim.'

With these words, he pressed the pistol-muzzle against the half-breed's breast, pulled the trigger and laid him dead at his feet.

Scarce had this shot been fired, than the captain turned to fall back to his men, but his further passage was stopped by an Indian, Stanapat's brother, who dealt him a blow with his discharged musket.

The captain parried the blow with his left arm, disabling it, and fell upon him with an irresistible shock. The Indian staggered and fell, with his enemy's knee on his breast.

'Well,' said the officer, 'you have come to have an addition to your punishment. You will have pains in your heart for the lashes on your back.'

'They are smoothed with the blood of the whites. Five scalps have dried up the blood.'

'You have felt whites punish,' said the captain, 'now you will have an Indian sentence.'

'My life is yours, slay me,' returned the red man, firmly.

'Be easy, I reserve a particular death for you.'

'Hasten, for soon it may be too late,' retorted the Indian, ironically.

'Well, since you will have it,' said the captain, tightening his hold, 'after taking a slight memento, I will send you to join your brothers.'

Then, unsheathing his knife, the captain passed it around his foeman's hand, grasped the scalplock with its feathers, and tore it off.

Indian though he was, the sufferer could not hold in a fearful cry, as the blood flowed down his face.

'Kill me, kill me.'

The captain rose, lifted the savage and bore him on his shoulders to the parapet, from which he flung him to the ground, which was covered with yelling Indians.

The Apaches, maddened at this sight, burst through the barricades, massacring and scalping all in their way.

Suddenly, without apparent motive, the Indians, who had thus far been successful, fell back and left the fortress.

'What is it now?' muttered the captain, who had joined his friends, 'what new deviltry are they up to?'

The attack was suspended by orders of Stanapat, to whom news of his brother's death had been brought.

Soon all was made clear to the Americans in the fort.

The Indians tore down the nearest huts, and brought their furniture and inflammable contents to the blockhouse in spite of the firing of the occupants of the fort.

At a given signal the piles were ignited at once, and soon the fort was the centre of a circle of flames, from whence came cries of pain, mingled with reports of fire-arms.

The Apaches looked on smilingly.

Suddenly a horrible crash was heard; the figures which had been frantically running on the flat roof of the fort, disappeared, and the fort fell in, sending up myriads of fiery particles.

All was over.

The Apaches planted a large pole in the spot where had been the village square; and, after having thrown torches into the cabins, assembled around their chiefs, with whom they all set off.

A mournful silence reigned upon the smouldering ruins, which had witnessed such heart-rending sights.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN ARISEN FROM THE DEAD

IT was nearly eight o'clock of the morning, a laughing autumn sun cast its gladsome beams upon the prairie.

Numerous birds darted hither and thither with merry notes whilst others hid amid the leafy coverts, were warbling melodic concerts. At times, a deer would show his startled head above the high grass, and disappear with a bound.

Four horsemen clad in complete woodsman's attire, with guns slung at their backs, knives and pistols at their waist were trotting along the bank of the Canadian River.

Three of these men were beyond doubt, Americans, although their dress was like that of the savages, being composed of fringed hunting-shirts and leggins, skin pouches and shot-belts adorned with colored quills, feathers and beadwork.

The one that rode first, half a horse's length ahead of his companions, was a stern featured, strong-limbed, powerful man, who went silently along with his eye and ear on the watch for every sound or sight of the prairie.

The two who came next were two young men, about twenty-four or twenty-five years of age, who were laughing and chatting gaily as if no cloud could ever dim the bright prospect before them.

A few paces behind them came the last man of the troop, an Indian, a sort of servant, who carried slung on his saddle-bow two bunches of birds, while he led a horse on which were two deer and several rabbits.

They were in a word the hunting-party of which we spoke in the preceding chapter as having gone from the settlement and not returned at the time when the Apaches fell upon and devastated the village.

While the persons whom we have just introduced, are riding quietly along, let us give some words of explanation on their antecedents.

A Mr. Clarkson of the State of Kentucky had married a sister of a man who had early left his home to seek a fortune in the Western wilds, and there had become one of the most skilful and intrepid hunters of the Far West. From time to time at varied intervals had came letters from this man giving glowing accounts of the beauties of the forest, the abundance of game, the fruitfulness of the soil, and the many gifts of nature the country rejoiced in. At length, leaving his family, Clarkson had set off, found his brother and guided by his experience, had chosen a plot of land in the settlement on the bank of the Canadian River.

He had returned to his family, made all necessary preparations and in the Spring, started and established himself on the selected site.

For four years, he had been blessed beyond his expectations ; a son had been born to him, the others, who had been boys when first there, had grown into hardy and unequalled hunters under the teachings of Clarkson's brother-in-law ; his daughter was a fine charming girl, as pure in heart as fair without, who who already took her mother's place in household affairs ; his

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lands had yielded abundance, and thanks to the furs and beaverskins sent yearly to be sold, the product of his son's and brother-in-law's rifles, the interior of the log-house was much more tasty and refined than his neighbor's.

A word of their follower, the Indian who leads the horse. Curumilla, for such was his name, had been found in an Indian village, nearly dead with disease the last man of his tribe (a once powerful one which had been cut off by enemies and wasted by small-pox, that scourge of the red race). He had been found, say we, by Harry and Edward Clarkson on a return from hunting, who placed him on a spare horse and brought him to their home, where he had been nursed by Mrs. Clarkson and her daughter. When cured, the Indian swore a lasting friendship for them, and had finally became a companion of their expeditions, saving their lives more than once by his strategetic skill.

Having now brought the past events of the Clarkson family up to the period at which we commences our recital, we will proceed.

The riders had now reached a place where the stream took a turn, thus preventing the village to be seen, although it was but a gunshot from the ford of the river which they were about to cross.

At the moment when their horses put their feet in the water, they made an abrupt backward movement.

'What is that?' said the foremost rider, starting from his reverie, and looking around him.

'Look!' cried the two brothers together, as they spurred on their steeds till they were all three abreast. They pointed to many dead bodies which were floating slowly down the stream.

One look was exchanged between the three, as digging the spurs into their horses' flanks, the animals neighed with pain, and clambered up the opposite bank.

Then all was clear to them.

They saw before them the scene of desolation.

From the heaps of ruin, a thick, black, and nauseating smoke ascended in long spirals to the sky.

In the village square rose the painted pole. Here and there lay corpses half devoured by wild beasts and vultures.

The hunters sprang from their horses and leaving them to wander where they would, they with difficulty discovered the spot on which their hut had been raised.

And what a sight!

An old man crushed by a blackened log, near him several dead Indians who proved his hard struggle to save the lives of those so dear to him. A girl fourteen years of age, near a woman, both pierced through and through with arrows and both scalped, completed that heart-rending spectacle for sons and a brother.

The Clarksons and their uncle commenced a search among the timbers and beams, a search which resulted only in their finding the body of the little boy who had been mutilated like the others.

Seating themselves on rocks near by, Harry and Edward burst in sobs, each one of which seemed as if it would break their breasts, and wept like children.

Brandard, their uncle, and Curumilla, men who had learned to stifle all outward expressions of feeling, began examining the arrows, which were easily to be recognized as shot from Apache bows from their peculiar shape and mountings.

Leaving his nephews to their lamentations, the old trapper and the Indian turned over the ruins of the fort from under which they thought they heard a feeble cry.

In about twenty minutes, the sound became clearer and more distinct.

‘Some one is here !’ said Brandard, ‘God grant that we have come in time to save, if but one.’

It was only after a long time and infinite trouble that they at last raised the species of trap from under which came the cries.

Then a horrid spectacle was presented to his eyes.

In a hole exhaling a foetid odor, twenty persons were literally piled one upon another.

The hunters instantly laid hands on the top layer, so to speak, and to their great joy, found one still breathing.

They pulled him out, laid him on some dry leaves and gave him some liquor from their flasks.

The wounded man breathed quicker, opened and shut his eyes several times, groaned and at length muttered in a broken voice :

‘I shall die, oh, God, I shall die !’

‘Never cease hoping while you have life,’ answered the old trapper.

A fleeting flush reddened the man’s cheek, a sad smile curled his pale lips.

‘Why should I live ?’ said he, ‘my friends are dead, Brand-

ard, the Indians have given me my death, my last shot has been fired.'

'Not so, you can live, if it is but for vengeance.'

The wounded man's eyes flashed fire, he half rose and cried:

'You're right! I will live! my brother's scalp decks an Apache's belt, for every hair of his head will I have a redskin's life!'

'You speak well, keep up a brave heart,' said Brandard encouragingly, 'tell me why did the Apaches attack the village?'

'That horsestealer was the brother of Stanapat, he swore revenge and has got it, though he lived not long to enjoy it: Captain Rogers killed the redskin. He was not the worst one though. More cruel than the Indians, more deaf to mercy, were those whites who were flogged.'

A few drops of liquor enabled the narrator to proceed.

'I saw your cabin attacked, while defending mine. Your brother-in-law was slain by that Spaniard who stabbed him from behind. Your mother and sister were killed because they would not follow the Indians. Your horses were stolen again by the same men who were caught and whipped last week. I knew them all, although their faces were painted. When my brother was killed, I had time to get into the fort, where I saw Stanapat's brother and a half-breed who betrayed us, killed by Captain Rogers. I thought of that hollow under the block-house and took refuge in it with others. When the fort fell in were covered with the ruins and were unable to breathe. How long I was there, in that den of suffering and despair, I know not. Swear, if I die, you will avenge me.'

'I need not your fate to spur me on; yonder lies my sister, and her children brained by the savage's tomahawk. If I swore not aloud, I did within, to follow to the death, their murderers.'

'Thanks, thanks,' muttered the wounded man, 'thanks. I tell you again that the American stabbed your sister's husband, that the tall Spaniard killed your sister because she resisted him, and that the Indians did the rest.'

Falling abruptly back, as if he had only then received the wound, the sole survivor of the settlers seemed as if he were dead.

Laying him carefully aside, the old hunter and the Indian returned to the cabin, dug shallow graves and buried the corpses of the mother, father, sister and brother of the two young men who still sat motionless on their seats gazing at them comple-

ing the burial ceremony with a now tearless eye. They had exhausted the fount of tears.

When the last clod of earth had been thrown over them, leaving Harry and Edward Clarkson still by the graves, Curumilla and the old hunter proceeded to inter the bodies of their old friends and acquaintances.

The afternoon passed, and it was not until the last rays of the sun faded away behind the mountains that they returned.

The old hunter touched the brothers on the shoulder, awaking them from their reverie.

'Tis time,' said he.

'For what?' asked the **two together**.

'To follow the assassins.'

Rising slowly from his seat, Harry approached the graves, took a handful of the upturned soil and raising it slowly to heaven, said :

'I swear that I will know no rest, no obstacles, no dangers, till this earth has drank in the blood of the assassins who have done this foul deed!'

His brother did the same, while Brandard looking upon them with a father's pride, smiled an approval of this oath.

Picking up their equipments and slinging their rifles behind them, the three men turned towards Curumilla who had watched them with that stoic passiveness in which Indians take so much pride.

'Curumilla,' said Brandard, 'have you heard?'

'Curumilla has heard,' returned the red man.

'We go, far perhaps, to satisfy our vengeance; Curumilla is free, the prairie is open before him.'

'Curumilla does not forget. There is his sister (pointing to the graves); there his mother and his father. He goes with his brothers: where they eat, he eats; where they sleep, he sleeps; where they go, he goes. Curumilla has spoken.'

Brandard smiled.

'I expected no less from you, Curumilla. A nobler heart beats not in the breasts of white man or red. You shall go with us, sharing our blanket, dividing our pemmican, partaking of our fire.'

The Indian heard this without remark, though perhaps he faintly smiled at the compliment.

The moon rose slowly in an ocean of vapor and spread its melancholy rays upon the four men, as bearing the wounded man on a litter, they turned their backs to the American vil-

lage in which all was silence and death, and went in the direction taken by the retreating Apaches.

CHAPTER III.

THE SUNBEAM.

ON a fine afternoon of the month of July, at the foot of some lofty cedar trees which shaded the ground beneath them from the incandescent rays of a burning sun straight over their summits, extended carelessly on the mossy ground, lie two men, who to keep nothing secret from the reader, we will state are Curumilla and Brandard.

Before them, on a low fire roasts a quarter of an elk.

'Well, Curumilla, the roast looks so tempting that I am afraid we will fall to before the boys come in; here's the sun within an hour of setting and I think we should be off. Did the boys say where they were going?'

'Yes, to Cedar Bottom,' returned the red man, as he cut off and tasted a bit of the elkmeat.

The screech of the brown owl, twice repeated, came faintly to the hunters' ears.

'Our friends,' said the old trapper, whistling in a peculiar way, without rising.

These words were scarcely spoken before a man, who was none other than Harry Clarkson, appeared, thrusting aside the branches which opposed his passage.

'Where is Ned and old William?' inquired he seating himself.

'They have not come yet,' was the answer.

'Something has delayed them, no doubt, for they would not intentionally keep us waiting with that before us,' said Brandard, pointing to the elkmeat.

A couple of birds which Harry Clarkson had brought were spitted and laid across the fire.

Some minutes passed, no more words were spoken, and all around was silent when suddenly Curumilla stopped abruptly in the position in which he was, as if some sound had struck his ear.

'What is it, Curumilla?' demanded Brandard.

'Hush!' said the red man without moving.

A long time was spent in listening and the two whites were just about beginning a conversation, thinking Curumilla had been deceived, when they distinctly heard a noise like a faint moan, but so weak and dull, that it required a hunter's exercised ear to have heard it.

The Indian and Brandard snatched up their rifles, an action imitated by Harry, and the three ran together to the bank of the river.

When they were all on the bank, a frightful sight lay before their eyes.

A long log was rolling down with the current, which ran quite strong in this place.

On this log was tied a woman who held an infant in her tightly clasped arms.

At every roll of the log, the poor woman was plunged with her child under water; at ten yards or less from the log, an enormous caiman was swimming after the two victims.

Brandard raised his rifle instantly to his shoulder.

Curumilla at the same time cast off his superfluous clothing, slipped into the water with his knife between his teeth and swam towards the log.

Brandard stood for some seconds motionless, as if he had been changed to a block of marble. Then pressing the trigger, the shot was fired, repeated from afar by the echoes. The caiman bounded upward, plunged, making the water boil about him, but re-appeared almost immediately with his belly in the air: he was dead.

The old trapper's bullet had entered his eye, and from that his brain.

By this time Curumilla was but a few lengths from the log.

Without losing time, he grasped the log and cutting across the river, keeping it steady, ran it soon on shore.

In two cuts he had severed the bonds which held the poor woman, took her in his arms and ran with her to the fire of the camp.

She gave no token of life.

The two white hunters pressed around her.

It was an Indian woman. She appeared to be about seventeen or eighteen years of age: she was very handsome.

Brandard had great trouble to open her arms and relieve her of the child.

The little creature, scarcely a year old, by some incompre-

hensible miracle thanks doubtless to its mother's devotion, had been completely preserved ; it smiled at Harry as he took it from his uncle and laid it on a bed of dry leaves.

Curumilla half opened with his knife the woman's mouth, introduced the mouth of his gourd and made her swallow some drops of mezcal.

A long while passed before the drowned woman made the least movement which indicated a return to life.

The hunters were not rebuffed by the ill success of their cares, but on the contrary redoubled their efforts.

Finally a deep sigh came from the Indian woman's breast, and she opened her eyes murmuring in a voice as weak as a breath, the one word of the Comanche language, well known to the hunters :

'*Xocoyotl* (my son) !'

Harry carefully took up the child, which had quietly fallen asleep on the bed of leaves, and presented it to the mother, saying :

'*Nantli, joltinemi* (mother, he lives) !'

With these words returned hope, the mother rose as if moved by a spring, took her little son and covered it with kisses intermingled with tears.

The hunters respected this outburst of maternal love ; they retired, after having left her a blanket, some food and water.

At sunset, Edward Clarkson and William Delarue returned. Delarue was the wounded man whom the Clarksons had found under the fort and whom they had borne away on a litter. He was a trapper, a French Canadian, who had dwelt with a married brother at the settlement, and had seen his relations and friends butchered before his eyes. He had consented to accompany Bandard and his nephews in their self-imposed task of vengeance which he swore to aid.

When he and Edward Clarkson were asked why they had staid so late, Delarue held up a rifle whose barrel was bursted from the touch-hole half up the barrel.

'What is that ?' inquired Bandard.

'Look !' replied Delarue, pointing to the stock.

The old trapper took it and read, carved rudely on the wood, 'This gun belongs to Nathan Sutter.'

'Where did you find this ?' cried the trapper, quickly.

'About two miles from Cedar Bottom, this side of it. We followed the trail of two men, one probably the man this belonged to, and saw them enter a hut, some six or eight miles from this. That is why we are late.'

‘Did you recognize them?’

‘Yes, Nathan Sutter was one, the other was the tall Spaniard who killed our brother.’

‘Enough. We will start at the break of day. Were those two the only ones in the cabin?’

‘No, we heard loud talking and laughing, in the cabin before they entered; there may be five or six there.’

‘Very well. We will see to-morrow. They will not leave their retreat, think you?’

‘No,’ said Delarue. ‘They have no suspicion of our being in the neighborhood.’

‘Well, let us have supper now. I was afraid you would leave us but the bones, on account of our delay.’

‘We were near doing so, Curumilla and I.’

The fire was replenished, the Indian woman invited to take a seat by the fire when she sat down lulling her babe to rest with some monotonous Indian ballad.

The meal was soon over, and after smoking a pipe or two, all laid down to rest, except the two Clarksons who watched turn by turn over their comrades and the woman they had saved.

At sunrise she awoke and, with the skill and quickness peculiar to women of her race, she kindled the fire and prepared the breakfast.

After eating their repast, the hunters lit their Indian pipes, and Brandard, seating himself at the foot of a tree, addressed the woman:

‘What do they call my daughter?’

‘Tonameyotl (the Sunbeam),’ replied she with a smile which discovered the two rows of pearls which adorned her mouth.

‘My daughter has a fine name,’ returned Brandard; ‘she no doubt belongs to the great nation of the Apaches?’

‘The Apaches are dogs,’ responded she in a hollow voice and flashing a glance of hate from her eyes, ‘the Comanche women weave the petticoats. The Apaches are cowardly like coyotes, they dare not fight but a hundred against one; the Comanche warriors are like the tempest.’

‘Is my daughter the wife of a *thatoani* (a chieftain)?’

‘Who is the warrior who knows not the Unicorn?’ said she proudly.

The hunters bowed. They had many times already heard the name of the chief; Brandard had even seen him; Mexicans and Indians, hunters and trappers, bore to him a respect mixed with terror.

‘Sunbeam is the Unicorn’s wife,’ said the Indian woman.

‘*Jectli* (good) !’ responded Brandard; ‘let my daughter tell me where he can find the *altepetl* (village) of her tribe, and we will take her thither.’

The young woman smiled.

‘I have in my heart a little bird which sings every instant of the day,’ said she in her sweet melodious voice; ‘the *cuicuitzcatl* (swallow) cannot live without its mate, the chief is on the Sunbeam’s track.’

‘We will await the chief here,’ returned the old hunter. ‘How came my daughter tied to the trunk of a tree and launched on the Gila, to perish with her infant ? it is an atrocious vengeance !’

‘Yes,’ said she, ‘an Apache’s vengeance. Aztatl (the Heron,) Stanapat’s daughter, the chief of the Apaches, loves the Unicorn her heart leaps at the very name of the great Comanche warrior, but the chief of my nation has but one heart, and that is the Sunbeam’s. Two days ago, the warriors of my tribe set off for a great buffalo hunt, the women alone remained in the village. While I was sleeping in my hut, four Apache thieves, profiting by my slumber, laid hands on me and my child and placed us in the hands of Stanapat’s daughter.

“‘You love your husband,’ said she sneering, ‘you doubtless suffer at being absent from him, be happy; I will send you to him by the shortest road. He hunts in the prairies down the river, in two hours you will be with him, unless,’ added she laughing, ‘unless the caimans stop you on the way.’ ‘The Comanche women scorn death,’ replied I, ‘for one hair you tear from me, the Unicorn will have the scalps of all your tribe—act as you please,’ and I turned aside my head, resolved to have no further word with her.

‘She bound me herself to the log with my face up to the sky, as she said, ‘that I might see my way,’ and then pushed me into the stream crying; ‘The Unicorn is a wolf whom the Apache women laugh at; this is how I avenge myself !’ I have told my father and my brothers, the white hunters, things as they happened.’

‘My daughter is a *ciuatl* (courageous woman);’ replied Brandard; ‘she is worthy to be the *tecihuauch* (spouse) of a renowned chief.’

The young woman smiled and presented her little son with a playful movement to the hunters who kissed its forehead.

At this moment the notes of a mawkawis (quail) came from a little distance.

The hunters sprang to their feet and looked around them
'The quail is not startled easily,' muttered old Brandard
suspiciously.

The Indian woman smiled without answering.
All at once a light noise of snapping branches troubled the
silence.

The hunters cocked their rifles.
'My brothers need not stir,' said the young woman quickly,
'it is a friend.'

The hunters laid their rifles down beside them.
The young woman then imitated with rare perfection the
call of the yellow-bird.

Then the bushes were parted and an Indian warrior armed
and painted for war, leaped like a panther over the obstructing
plants and stopped facing the white men.

This warrior was the Unicorn.
He saluted the men with that gracefulness innate in Indians ;
then crossed his arms over his breast and stood erect and motionless, without glancing at the Indian woman, whom he did
not appear to have seen.

On her side, the Sunbeam made no gesture.
For several seconds, a painful silence weighed upon the persons whom chance had so strangely brought together.

At last Brandard, who had recognized the chief and who
saw that the latter obstinately maintained his muteness, decided to speak himself.

'The Unicorn is welcome to our camp,' began he ; let him
take a place at the fire of his brothers and partake with them
of the food they possess.'

'I will take a place by my pale-face brothers,' said the red
man, 'but they must answer a question I would address them.'

'Our brother may speak ; our ears are open.'

'Well,' rejoined the chief ; 'why have the white hunters
the Unicorn's wife with them ?'

'Let Sunbeam herself answer the question,' said the old
trapper.

The chief turned towards his wife.
'I am waiting,' said he.

The Indian woman repeated word for word to her husband
what she had said a short time previously.

The Unicorn heard her without evincing surprise or anger,
his visage remained passionless except that perhaps he mo-
mentarily frowned.

When his wife had done speaking, the Comanche chief lowered his head on his breast and dwelt for an instant plunged in serious reflections. Then he raised his head.

'Who saved Sunbeam from the stream where she would have perished?' asked he.

The young woman's face brightened with a smile.

'These hunters,' said she, pointing to Curumilla and Brandard.

'Good,' exclaimed the chief casting on the two men a look impressed with an expression of unspeakable gratitude.

'Could we have let her perish?' said the old trapper.

'My brothers have acted well. The Unicorn is one of the foremost sachems of his nation, his tongue is not double, he gives his heart but once and that to the hunters.'

These simple words were pronounced with that majesty and grandeur which the Indians know so well, when they please, to put in their speeches.

The hunters bowed in token of thanks.

The chief continued:

'The Unicorn returns to his village with his wife, his young men are waiting a few rods from here; he would be happy if the hunters would accompany him.'

'Chief,' replied Brandard, 'we are here to hunt.'

'Well, what of that? my brothers can hunt with me and my young men; they can then slay more buffaloes.'

'Chief, it is not buffaloes we hunt, but men.'

'All the better. My young men are more skilled for the warpath than for the prairie. Are my brothers' enemies numerous?'

'About ten or twelve men.'

'Pooh! But if my brothers would prove that they accept my friendship, let them follow me to my village.'

'Very well,' said Brandard who whispered some words in the ears of Harry and his brother who turned and went to sit down by the fire.

'Why is that?' said the chief; 'the friends of my brothers are my friends. They will be welcome at the village.'

'I know it, chief,' began the old trapper, 'but our enemies must be watched.'

'The Unicorn has spies; my brother can command, they will obey. Who are his enemies?'

Delarue stepped forward and explained to the chief the whereabouts of the hut into which he had seen the two men enter.

‘ My young men shall go,’ said the chief. ‘ Do my brothers now come to my village ? ’

‘ But the chief has a horse and we are on foot.’

‘ I have horses.’

To resist longer might have been construed into an insult to the chief ; the hunters accepted the invitation. Old Brandard at heart was not sorry to make friends and have at need allies from whom he could claim help.

The squaw had got up ; she timidly approached her husband and held out the child, saying fearingly :

‘ *O wai paysk Ik Ihomogonisk* (embrace this warrior).’

The chief took the child, kissed it and returned it to the mother.

The latter wrapped it up in a blanket, tied it to a board lined with dry moss, placed a cover over its head to shield it from the sun and suspended the whole on her back by means of a band of linen which she fixed to her forehead.

‘ I am ready,’ said she.

The chief started off, followed by all the hunters, Curumilla being the last man.

They were soon lost to the view.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HUT IN THE WOODS.

As had been said by Delarue and Edward Clarkson, they had followed two men, one of whom had burst his rifle firing at some game and had then carelessly flung it aside, and had seen them enter a hut from which noise of talking and revelry had been heard.

This hut was situated in a spot too charming to be profaned by the heavy feet of the horsestealers, pirates of the prairies and robbers who had made there their dwelling.

The building was a little one story cabin formed of logs and interlaced branches, divided into several compartments, with a corral behind for the horses. It was built on the left bank of a little brook which flowed into the Gila.

Within the largest room three or four men were seated drinking and playing cards.

Let us describe them.

The one who first calls our attention is a tall powerful colossus, nearly six feet high, who at one glance would be recognized as the master-spirit of the party. He was named John Sutter, was an American, and with his two sons (of whom we will speak hereafter), had been for many years captain of a gang of men who caused more terror on the frontiers than even the Indians. His troop had been, some weeks before the attack of the settlement described in our first chapter, reduced from twenty men to five, himself, his two sons, and two Mexicans, by an attack from Indians. They had escaped with great exertions, had endeavored, shortly after, to steal horses for themselves from the stables of Mr. Clarkson, in company with an Indian, Stanapat's brother, had been caught, flogged and expelled from the settlement. Smarting with their wounds, they had joined the Apaches and fell upon the settlement as before described. After the attack, glutted with blood and plunder, the five men, still commanded by Sutter, had sought a retreat, from whence they could renew their assaults on travelling parties of emigrants or gold seekers; they had chosen the site on which we find them and had built there a cabin.

The second man, (a Spanish gambusino), was at this moment of our entering, deep in study of the game of *monte*, played by himself and a Mexican outcast.

This Spaniard's name is Simon Munez, of whose early life nothing was known, and nothing good could be divined, judging from his sullen, vindictive countenance.

His opponent at the game was a man most singularly formed in features, for he so much resembled a dog that the Indians and his comrades had given him the nickname of *Dog's-face*. This name had so well suited the Mexican that, whether he pleased or not, he had been obliged to accept it. He had, at the age of sixteen, been imprisoned for stabbing a muleteer in Santa Fe, had easily escaped from the dungeon by means of a friendly gaoler, and had joined a low set of *pícaros*. Their division of the spoils had disgusted him, so, one day making off with as much as he could carry of the combined plunder of the band, he had fled to some interior town of Mexico. Where, soon fleeced of his money by more expert gamblers than himself, he had been forced to rob alone, until he had by some chance, become one of Sutter's gang. He was a small, wiry man, endowed with extraordinary strength.

One man, beyond doubt an American, who so much resem-

bled old Sutter that, without knowing the fact, one would pronounce him his son, near the fire superintending some game cooking. He was very nearly as tall as his father, and lacked but little of his wonderful strength. A long slash, from a sword or a knife, from his left eye down to his chin, gave a fearful expression to his already no way pleasing visage.

For more than an hour, no sound breaks the silence, but a low 'two of spades' (*dos de espadas*) 'curses on the cards,' or similar expressions from the two gamesters.

Old Sutter stands leaning by the door, in evident ill-humor.

His son is still by the fire, giving a last turn to the roasting venison.

At last old Sutter turns quickly from the door, and says to the players :

'Come, be quick with that game; here comes Wat and Pepito.'

The gamblers picked up their cards sullenly, put the packs in their boots and drew their chairs from the table.

'Come, Dick, look alive!' cried Sutter to the man who was cooking. 'Put on a cloth and dish the venison.'

A sound of feet outside the door announced some new arrival, and soon there entered the two men whom Delarue had designated as the tall Spaniard and Nathan Sutter.

Pepito Rosario, or Don Pepito as he was called by those who desired to please him, was a man of high stature, somewhat thin, who was what is vulgarly called infernally handsome.

He is dressed with a care to appearance which makes him look the gentleman beside his less careful companions. He had at one time been proprietor of a *rancho* and lands in New Mexico, but had gambled them away in his passion for monte. He had taken to the road, had become as low as the lowest and was, truth to say, no unsuitable comrade for Simon Munoz, Dogsface and the Sutters.

Nathan Sutter advanced and threw himself into a seat by the table.

It was only then that his father perceived that he carried no gun.

'How now, Nat! where's your rifle?' inquired he.

The American held up his right hand, encircled with a blood-stained bandage.

'The cursed rifle burst, blew off two or three of my fingers, for a blessing not taking the whole hand,' replied he angrily.

'What news have yo', Nat?' said his father examining the

hand which as his son had said, had lost two fingers, the little one wholly, the third one from the second joint.

‘None at all, or worse. I tell you, father, the wood is too quiet ; we, Pepito and I, found no Indian tracks, but we fear they are around.’

‘But,’ said Sutter, ‘no war party is likely to approach this pot, and as for single warriors, we need not fear them.’

‘But, father, I say we must be cautious ; I feel I was wrong in leaving my gun in the woods ; if found it will point me out directly—my name is on the stock.’

‘Well, let us get over our meal, at any rate, for Pepito eyes the meat savagely ; we can send scouts out after dinner.’

The whole company sat down at table and the only sound in the room was the rattling of knives and plates.

The meal lasted about half an hour, when, the table being cleared away, cards were again brought out while others lit their pipes.

Four or five days passed without the bandits undertaking any new enterprises. At that period, they were greatly puzzled at the non-appearance of Simon Munez who had been many hours from the hut. At about three o’clock of the afternoon, Sutter was about dispatching his two sons in his search, when a faint crack of a rifle followed by several others was heard.

The men ran to the cabin door, and saw hastening towards them Simon Munez, who held in his hand an Indian’s dripping scalp.

When he entered, he was a few minutes recovering his breath. Then he cried :

‘A band of Comanches, with some whites are on horses, coming this way. I cut off a scout, learned who they were, and ran to warn you—we had better take to our horses ! for they are surely in our search.’

There was a moment of terrible confusion.

‘Go saddle the horses,’ cried old Sutter to Nathan and Pepito. ‘We will be with you in a moment.’

The preparations for starting took no great while ; in five minutes, the men who had staid in the cabin, had rummaged all their concealments of booty, the most valuable articles were pocketed, and soon the five men were together in the corral.

‘Which way are we going ?’ demanded they of Sutter.

‘We must gain the mountains,’ replied the old bandit.

Let us leave them riding off at full speed, while we return to Brandard, his nephews, Delarue and Curumilla, whom we left with the Comanche chief.

CHAPTER V.

THE ADOPTION.

SIXTY Comanche warriors were extended on the grass awaiting their sachem, while their horses, fastened with lassoes, were cropping the high herbage of the plain and the young sprouts of trees.

At the first glance these men would have been recognized as warriors chosen with care for a dangerous expedition ; every one dragged behind his heel five or six wolf-tails, marks of honor which renowned braves have alone the right to wear. On seeing their chief, they rose and leaped into their saddles.

There was not one but knew that their sachem's wife had been stolen away and that the aim of their expedition was to deliver her ; yet, on seeing her, they manifested no surprise and saluted her as if she had only quitted them a few minutes before.

This war-party had many spare horses with it ; the chief had his wife and new friends mounted ; then, on a sign from him, the cavalcade started and set off at full gallop, the only pace Indians know.

After nearly two hours ride, they arrived within a short distance of the village which they knew was near, on account of the habit the Comanches have of placing their dead outside the village on scaffolds ; these scaffolds were composed of four stakes, at the top of which is a platform, holding the body and hung about with skins and other offerings made by the Indians to the good spirits.

At the first wigwams of the village, a throng of horsemen were assembled awaiting their sachem's return ; when they perceived him, they shouted a loud hurrah and came up amid a whirlwind of dust, shooting their guns and brandishing their weapons.

The Unicorn's troop did the same, and all became a noisy confusion ; the sachem entered the village amid the barkings of dogs, shouts and gunshots ; he was accompanied to the square by an undescribable throng.

There, the warriors stopped. The Unicorn made the hunters dismount and guided them to his *calli* (hut), into which he made them precede him.

'Now,' said he, 'brothers, you are in your own house ; rest in peace, eat, drink. This evening, I will come to you and make a proposition which I sincerely trust you will not reject.'

The hunters, fatigued with their long ride, extended themselves with extreme pleasure, on the beds of dried and fragrant leaves.

'Well,' demanded Brandard, 'what think you, lads?'

'Why,' said Delarue, 'in my opinion, we can fear no harm; the chief can be trusted.'

'There will not only come no harm to us,' said Harry Clarkson, 'but on the contrary, a great deal of good.'

'How so, nephew?' inquired the old hunter.

'Why, we have won the friendship, or at least you have, of the chief, and can at need call upon him for aid.'

'What aid do we want, Harry?' asked his brother; 'Bill tells us he thinks there are no more than half a dozen at most in that hut which shelters our father's murderers; and here are four, and I make five, to meet them.'

'Aye, Ned,' returned his brother, 'but then, if they had the Apaches once to help them, they may again. Curumilla, uncle and Bill are good shots but they cannot hold out against old Sutter with the Apaches to back them.'

'Harry is right,' said the elder Clarkson. 'We should at need have the Unicorn on our side.'

'Well, nephews, you had better sleep; Bill, Curumilla and I will soon join your example,' said the trapper; 'we have something to talk about.'

The two brothers were soon slumbering deeply, while the Indian and the two whites had a long conversation on what could be the proposition which the Unicorn had promised to make them.

As he had promised to do, towards evening the Unicorn entered the cabin.

'Are my brothers rested?' asked he.

'Yes,' replied they.

'Are they ready to hear me?'

'Speak, chief, we are listening.'

The Comanche sachem extended his arm as it were to give more force to his words and commenced thus, addressing Brandard whom he seemed to recognize as the head of the party:

'Brother, you and your friends are brave warriors, the prairies rejoice at your coming among us; the deer and the buffalo flee at your approach, for your arm is strong and your aim sure. The Unicorn is but one Indian, but he is a great warrior of the Comanches and a chief renowned in his tribe;

you have saved his wife, the Sunbeam, whom the Apache dogs sent floating down the Rio Gila a prey to the hideous alligators. Since his wife, the joy of his calli, and his son, the hope of his old days, have been returned him, the Unicorn has sought in his heart the means of proving his gratitude ; he has asked the Master of Life what could he do to attach you to him. The Unicorn is terrible in combat, he has the heart of the grizzly bear for his enemies, he has the heart of the gazelle for those he loves.'

'Chief,' returned the old hunter, 'the words you have uttered pay us amply for what we have done ; we are happy to have saved the son and wife of a celebrated warrior ; our recompence is in our hearts, we wish no other.'

The chief shook his head.

'No,' said he, 'the white hunters are no longer strangers to the Comanches ; they are brothers for our tribe. While they slept, the Unicorn assembled round the council-fire the chiefs of his nation, he told them what has passed : the chiefs think like the Unicorn, they have charged him to make known to the hunters the resolution they have taken.'

'Speak, chief,' responded Brandard, 'and believe that the desires of the council are orders for us.'

A smile of joy parted the chief's lips.

'Good !' said he. 'Here is what the great chiefs have agreed ; my brothers, the hunters, will be adopted by the tribe ; they will henceforth be sons of the Comanche nation. What say my brothers ?'

A lively sentiment of pleasure made the old hunter start at this unexpected proposal ; to be adopted by the Comanches was to obtain the right of traversing all the territory which that powerful nation governed by its untameable courage and its numerous warriors, and to be able to ask assistance in the project of vengeance which had united the five men. Brandard exchanged a look with his companions and rose.

'I accept for myself and friends,' said he, holding out his hand to the chief, 'the honor which the Comanches do us to admit us among the number of the sons of that warlike nation. We shall try to be worthy of the great favor.'

The Unicorn smiled.

'To-morrow,' said he, rising, 'my brothers will be adopted by the nation.'

After having gracefully saluted the hunters, he retired.

The next morning, the chief entered the calli.

The old trapper and his friends were ready ; they had been talking the night before of the proofs they would have to suffer.

The neophytes were conducted to the medicine lodge, where a copious repast was prepared.

This repast was composed of dog's flesh boiled in bear's grease, tortillas and cakes of maize.

The chiefs sat down, and were served by the squaws.

When the meal was terminated, every one rose ; the Unicorn laid his hands on the hunters' heads, and chanted the great war-song.

This song was repeated in chorus by those around, to the sound of warwhistles, drums, and *chiehikoues*, (a musical instrument similar to a large rattle).

Here is the translation of the chant :

'Master of Life, view us with a favorable eye.

We receive brothers in arms, who show their vigorous arms, their far-seeing eyes, their agile limbs.

'They fear not to expose themselves to the enemies' blows.'

It is impossible, if one has not witnessed such a scene, to form an idea, even a distant one, of the fearful din which was made by these hoarse voices, mingled with shrill discordant instruments : it was enough to make one deaf.

When the chant was terminated, each one took seats around the council-fire.

The hunters were seated on beaver-skins, and were presented with the great calumet of war, of which they took a few puffs, and finally passed it around the circle.

The Unicorn rose then, and attached to each one a wampum collar, and a necklace of grizzly bears' claws.

Then all rose.

Near the medicine lodge the Indians had constructed in less than an hour a *sweating-cabin*.

When this cabin was finished, the hunters threw off their clothing and entered it.

The chiefs brought two red hot stones, which they placed near vessels of bark full of water, then going out, they closed the door, and left the neophytes to themselves.

The latter threw the water on the stones ; steam instantly rose and made them sweat profusely.

When the perspiration had reached its height, the hunters ran out of the hut, passed through the midst of two files of Comanche warriors, and, as customary, plunged into the river.

They immediately left the water, were enveloped in blankets and conducted, still to the sound of infernal music, to the Unicorn's calli, to undergo the last test, which is also the most painful.

The hunters were extended on their backs ; then, with a pointed stick dipped in water wherein powder had been dissolved, the Unicorn traced on their breasts the figure of the animal which served as *talem* (protector) to the tribe.

Then, with ten needles mounted in a handle of wood, and dipped in vermillion, he proceeded to prick in the design ; the places which were not marked with vermillion were rubbed with gunpowder, so that there resulted a blue and red tattooing.

During the operation, the warsongs and rattling of chichikoues never ceased to drown the cries which the atrocious pain might draw from the patients.

But the latter supported all without more than a slight frown or a twitch of the muscles bearing witness to their sufferings.

When the tattooing was completed, the wounds were cauterized to prevent suppuration, and laved in cold water in which had been infused the herb called *pockqueesegou*, a plant which the Indians mix with their tobacco to make it mild.

The hunters, having bravely supported the tests for the six hours they endured, without uttering a groan or showing a sign of weakness, were considered by the Indians, from that moment, with a species of respect ; for with them courage is the first qualification.

'My brothers are sons of the tribe,' said the chief, offering each one a horse ; 'the prairie is theirs.'

They followed the chiefs to the medicine lodge, where, after each man had taken his place around the fire, a new calumet was smoked, and the Unicorn rose.

'The Master of life (God) loves his Comanche sons, since he has given them for brothers warriors like Curumilla and the white hunters. Who can equal their courage ? who can withstand them ? The grizzly bear hides at their approach at the bottom of his den ; the jaguar bounds far from them ; the eagle itself, who can gaze at the sun, flies their infallible ball. Brothers, we are happy to hail ye among our number ; henceforth we shall be invincible.'

The hunters thanked their new brothers warmly, and were led back to the Unicorn's calli, where all the chiefs withdrew, except their host.

'Well,' said Brandard, who was, from his age and experience

constituted leader and spokesman of the party, 'the Unicorn can speak, the ears of his brothers are open.'

'Can the Unicorn do aught for his brothers?' demanded the Comanche. 'The scouts sent out have returned, and say that five or six men live in the hut on Deer Creek; are they the men my brothers seek?'

'They are, chief; and we will start to-morrow morning to capture them.'

'No, the Unicorn has warriors who have the eyes of the tiger-cat; the bandits cannot evade them.'

'What does my brother advise?' inquired Brandard, who saw that the chief was desirous of doing something for them.

'The Unicorn knows those men, they are scorned by the whites and despised by the red men; they have treacherously murdered more than one of my men, in company with the Apaches, and the Unicorn would help his brothers to slay them, is not that my brother's intention?'

'Chief, not one of those you see around you has not some terrible account to settle with that miscreant. Whom has he most outraged? these'—said the old trapper, pointing to his nephews, and warming with his subject, which led him to throw off his usual impassiveness,—'these lost a mother when I lost a sister; Sutter, for I've found out the villain's name, cowardly stabbed their father; others of the gang killed the relations of my friend, Delarue, and we have sworn an oath, that is to apply to the murderers Lynch Law; but Lynch Law in all its rigor eye for eye, tooth for tooth!'

'Good!' said the Unicorn, 'my brother speaks like the warrior he is. Let him rest and two days from this he can go on the warpath against his foes.'

Saluting them gracefully, the Indian chief left the hut.

Two days afterward, the whites and Curumilla were completely over the effects of the tests they had undergone at their adoption. They were forced to accept an escort of twenty picked warriors with whom came the Unicorn, to accompany them to the attack of the bandit's cabin.

Simon Murez, as we know, had been out on a search for game, when his attention had been attracted to a thicket by the strange movements of his horse. Tying the animal to a tree he had crept slowly and silently on when, peering through an opening in a bush, he had seen an Indian, a Comanche armed and painted for war, half bent over the ground, examining a trail which the bandits had taken no pains to conceal from its

proximity to their hut. In the belief that the Indian was some single warrior who, if let escape, might return to his tribe with a tale which might endanger the security of his friends and himself, Simon had instantly took aim and mortally wounded the savage, who fell with a cry of alarm.

Scarcely had the sound died away and Simon secured the Indian's scalp, before he heard the noise of galloping horses, and whoops, and descried several Indians and white men some distance at the foot of the hill on which he was standing. They had not seen him, but fired several shots at the spot from which they had heard the gunshot and seen the white smoke mount above the trees. Simon waited for no more, but hurried to his horse, untied him and hastened off to bear the alarm to his comrades.

Its effect we have seen.

The fugitives had barely disappeared behind the trees ere the rapid tramp of a troupe of horsemen came to the ear and many men, white and red, came galloping up to the hut. Among them we recognize the Unicorn, Brandard, Delarue, Curumilla and the Clarksons.

'Hum!' said the old trappers, when they came to within a dozen yards of the hut, 'it is very silent here.'

'The bandits are perhaps out on a hunt,' interposed Delarue.

Brandard laughed.

'You think so?' said he, 'no, William, remember that shot and the dead Indian. They have taken the alarm.'

Harry Clarkson and his brother had already dismounted and kicked open the door.

'No one!' cried they rushing out. 'To horse, again! they can't be far off.'

The troop started again.

Curumilla remained an instant behind and flung a flaming brand into the cabin, which soon took fire and burst into flames.

'Their retreat will serve them no more!' said the Indian, rejoining his companions.

CHAPTER VI.

CURUMILLA.

ONE month after the events which we have related in our last chapter, in the first days of the month of December which the Comanche Indians call *ah-escia kiouska-oni*, that is to say, the moon of the buck which sheds its horns, some few moments after sunset, four or five men, who from their costume were easily to be recognized as hunters of the prairies of the Far West, clambered up on to one of the highest peaks of the Sierra de los Comanches, an eastern branch of the Rocky Mountains which extends to Texas where it terminates in the Guadalupe Mountain.

The air was cold, a thick layer of snow covered the sides of the mountain. The ascent which these bold adventurers followed was so rugged that, although they seemed accustomed to such travelling, they were often forced to sling their rifles behind them and climb by the aid of both hands and knees.

But no difficulty repulsed them, no obstacle was strong enough to make them seek another road.

At times, exhausted with fatigue and wet with sweat, they would stop to repose extended on snow, of which they swallowed handfuls to quench the burning thirst which devoured them, then, when rested a little, they would start once more and recommence to climb that eternal ice whose gigantic masses were at each step more forbidding.

Were these men in search of a practicable path in that fearful labyrinth of mountains whose peaks upreared to an immense height, in the glacial regions of the rarified atmosphere?

Or rather, might they not, for reasons known to themselves, be wishing to attain a spot from whence they could discover a vast view?

If the latter was their hope, they had gained it.

When after numberless fatigues they had finally reached the summit of the peak they were ascending, they saw before their eyes a country the grandeur of which astonished and made them marvel at its sublime immensity.

On whatever side they directed their looks, they were confounded by the majesty of the panorama unfolded at their feet.

The Rocky Mountains are strange mountains, unique in the world, which have no one point of resemblance with the Pyrenees, the Alps, the Appenines and all those magnificent chains

of mountains which, from space to space, rise above the old world and seem, with their hoary heads, to protest, in their Creator's name, against the pride of men.

The hunters soared, so to say, over a world.

Below them was the Sierra de los Comanches, which is but one immense mountain divided into snowy peaks of which the gloomy cavities were to be seen with their deep imposing valleys, their brilliant lakes, their shadowy defiles and their foaming torrents which go leaping from rock to rock ; then, far, far away from these savage limits, the sight of the hunters was lost in a boundless country veiled in the horizon with a blueish vapor, like the surface of the ocean in calm weather.

Thanks to the purity and transparency of the atmosphere, the adventurers could distinguish small objects at an astonishing distance.

However, in all probability, these men had not undertaken this perilous ascension for simple curiosity. The manner wherein they examined the country and analyzed the different portions of the vast panorama spread out before them proved on the contrary, that grave reasons had urged them to brave the almost unsurmountable difficulties which they had overcome to attain the point on which we find them.

The group, formed by these men with sunburned faces, energetic countenances and picturesque costumes, leaning on their rifles, their eyes fixed on the space, had something grand in its aspect ; to see men at that incomprehensible elevation, on the summit of that peak covered with never-melting snow whose base formed, so to say, a pedestal, in the midst of the tempest-tossed and upturned nature which on all sides encompassed them.

For a long time while they stood thus without speaking, endeavoring to distinguish the least formations of the earth, deaf to the lugubrious rolling of the torrents which foamed beneath them, and to the ominous slides of the avalanches which glided down the steeps and were precipitated below in the valleys, bearing rocks and trees along with them.

At length the man who appeared to be leader of the party, passed the back of his right hand over his brow wet with sweat despite the chilly air, and, turning towards his companions, said :

‘ Friends, we are twenty feet above the level of the plain, we are at the height at which the Indian warrior perceives for the first time, after death, the land of spirits, and contem-

plates the territories and hunting-grounds, the resting place of the just, free and generous warriors ! The eagle alone can soar above us !

'Yes,' returned one of his companions shaking his head, 'yes, uncle, but I've been looking on every side, and I see no possibility of escaping.'

'Hum !' resumed the first speaker, 'why do you say that Harry ? One would suppose, God pardon me if wrong ! that you, a Christian and my nephew, despairs.'

'That supposition lacks not much from being right, uncle,' replied the young man who was no other than Harry Clarkson ; 'see, uncle ; for ten days we have been lost in these mountains, surrounded by snow and ice, without anything scarcely to eat, and I must confess that I commence, not to despair, but to believe that unless by a miracle we will never get out of this inextricable chaos in which we are enclosed.'

Brandard shook his head.

The four men on the mountain peak were indeed the old hunter, his nephews and Curumilla.

In a few words we will explain how we meet them here. When they had taken up the trail of their enemies they had followed them for two days and two nights ; then, they had fallen in with the bandits who had made their escape, killing five or six warriors of the Unicorn's men, wounding Delarue severely and receiving no serious harm themselves beyond a few scratches. Brandard had then parted with the Unicorn, who took Delarue back to his village where he promised he should receive every care, taking with him Curumilla and his nephews.

Sutter with his men had managed to throw the hunters off the trail and had baffled their attempts for he had now learned, though he knew not the reason, that his pursuers were seeking his life. Brandard and his friends had been lost in the mountains and had wandered for more than a week before they attained the peak on which we see them.

'I see, uncle,' resumed Harry, 'that you agree with me that our position, instead of becoming better is, on the other hand, much worse ; since two days, provisions have completely failed us, and I do not see how, in these regions of ice, we can procure others. Sutter has deceived you and Curumilla, experienced hunters, and has drawn us into a trap from which we cannot get out and in which we will find death.'

A mournful silence followed.

Unable to stand erect, resembling corpses more than human beings, with hollow cheeks, and feverish eyes, were a prey to a devouring hunger, yet were calm and resigned, seeing at their feet a gladdening country in which bounded millions of animals and on which grew numerous trees overburdened with fruit.

But between that land and themselves rose a barrier not to be crossed, one that neither strength nor cunning could move, all that it was possible for human beings to do to save their life those men for ten days, had done. All their projects had been thwarted by a strange fatality, which had made them continually turn in the same circle among those mountains which resembled each other to such a degree, that all their attempts had been without success.

'Pardon me, poor boys,' said the old trapper, 'I was wrong in bringing you with me; 'twas I alone, an old man whose loss would have been nothing, who should have undertaken the task.'

'Do not speak so, uncle,' cried Edward quickly, 'all is not yet lost, since we live!'

The old man smiled sadly.

'Come, come,' resumed Edward, 'what's done cannot be undone. Instead of wasting precious time in useless recriminations, let us rather seek the means of releasing ourselves.'

'Alas, it is impossible!' said his brother in discouragement; and, drooping his head on his breast, he sat down on the snow, buried in reflections.

'Come, cheer up, Harry; impossible is a word we Americans have scratched from the dictionary. While the heart beats in one's breast, there is hope. Cunning as are the bandits, take my word on it, we will not only get clear of this but also find the villains again.'

'Would I could believe you,' said his brother despondently, 'how will we do so?'

'I do not know; but I am certain we will, uncle will find some plan.'

'Ah, if we were only where those two horsemen are,' said Harry Clarkson with a sigh, 'we would be safe.'

'What horsemen are you speaking of? Where do you see them?' inquired old Bandard eagerly.

The young man held out his arm in a northwesterly direction.

'There they are, near that clump of oaks!' said he, 'don't you see them?'

'Yes,' replied Brandard, 'they are riding along tranquilly, like men who know the road before them and have nothing to fear.'

'They are fortunate!' murmured the young man.

'Bah, who knows what awaits them at the first turn of the road they are so peacefully following?' said Edward laughing; 'no one can answer for the next minute; they are on the road from Independance to Santa Fe.'

'Well, I would I were there also,' grumbled the young man through his teeth.

Brandard, who had at first cast on the travellers a passing glance, followed them now with interest, almost with anxiety, but soon they disappeared at an angle of the road.

Nevertheless, for a long while the hunter remained with eyes riveted on the point from whence they had first appeared, little by little his eye brows frowned, a deep crease wrinkled his forehead, and he stood mute and motionless, leaning on his rifle, seeming a prey to deep emotion.

Despite themselves, his companions followed with a growing interest the progress of his mind, which might as it were be read on his brow.

He remained for some time absorbed in himself. At last he raised his head suddenly, and flinging about him a clear and intrepid glance, said with a joyful voice and striking the butt of his gun emphatically on the ice :

'My friends, take courage; I believe, this time I have found the means of leaving safe and sound this place which imprisons us.'

His hearers uttered a sigh of relief, almost of joy.

They knew the old hunter, they knew how fertile was that intrepid mind in expedients and inaccessible to discouragement; they had, in short, entire faith in him.

Brandard announced that he would save them, they believed him. They did not suspect what means he would employ—that was his lookout, not theirs. Now, they were tranquil, for he had given his word, that word which the old hunter had never broken; they had nothing further to do but patiently await the hour for their deliverance.

'What did I tell you, Harry?' said the young man's brother; 'I knew well enough we would not stay here.'

'When do we start?' asked Harry.

'When it comes night,' replied his uncle; 'but where is Curumilla?'

‘Sooth to say, I don’t know. Half an hour ago I saw him slip along the mountain side, as if he had suddenly become mad. I have not seen him since.’

‘Curumilla does nothing without reason,’ said the old hunter ‘you will see him return soon.’

Indeed, scarcely had the old man ceased speaking, than the Indian’s head showed itself above the level of the platform, then his body and, with a bound, he was by his friends.

His zarape, tied by the four corners, hung behind his back.

‘What are you carrying there, Curumilla?’ inquired Brandard smiling; ‘can it be food?’

‘It is most welcome, then?’ exclaimed Harry Clarkson, ‘for I am as hungry as a wolf.’

‘Where did you get provisions in these fearful regions?’ asked Edward.

‘Let my brothers look!’ was the Indian’s simple rejoinder. And he threw his burden on the ground.

The Clarksons untied the knots.

The hunters uttered an exclamation of joyful surprise.

The zarape contained a hare, a young peccary and many birds.

These provisions caused an emotion in these men which can only be understood by those who like them, have been for forty-eight hours without eating and have passed through all the pangs of hunger without power to appease them.

When their first delirium was over, Brandard turned towards the Indian, and, shaking his hand tenderly while a tear rolled down his weather-beaten cheek, said:

‘Is my brother a sorcerer?’

The Indian smiled gently and extending his arm towards an eagle which was hovering over a rock a little distance from the spot where the hunters were standing, said:

‘We have shared.’

The hunters could not restrain a cry of admiration; all was explained.

The Indian, whom nothing seemed to escape, had seen the eagle, had divined where was the nest and had introduced himself into the ærie to take a portion of the eaglets’ food, while the white men had nearly fallen into despair.

‘Oh!’ said Brandard joyfully, ‘it is now we are really saved, since we will gain the strength of which we have so much need to succeed in the project I have conceived; follow me, let us return to our camp, eat gayly the dinner which, thanks to Cur-

Curumilla's devotion, the eagles have furnished, and this evening we will set off.'

Comforted by these words, the hunters followed him, and the little troop quickly descended the mountain which they had gone up with so many difficulties and such despair at heart.

CHAPTER VII.

EL MAL PASO.

It took the hunters barely an hour to descend that mountain, which had required eight hours to ascend.

Their encampment was placed on the top of a rugged rock, in an impregnable position.

Their bold attempt of scaling the peak we have spoken of, instead of one result, had two, inasmuch as not only had Brandard discovered what he sought for, but Curumilla had besides found provisions.

So the hunters gleefully returned to the camp which they had left with gloomy thoughts in their hearts.

No one, unless he has found himself in an analogous situation, can imagine the happy sensation which fills the soul when, from the most complete despair, without other transition, it passes suddenly to the fullest confidence.

When they reached the camp, Brandard relit the fire which they had permitted to go out and stay extinguished for two days, for it had been useless to them.

As the smoke from the fire might excite the suspicions of those they pursued if, as was probable, they were concealed in the neighborhood, and reveal the exact position of their pursuers, the hunters roasted their provisions in a cavity of the rock which opened in the side of the hill by which they had established their encampment.

When all was ready, they began to eat.

It was only when their first hunger was appeased, that they thought to thank again the Indian chief for the copious repast he had procured them by his address, a repast for which they had such pressing need.

And then, (what they had not perceived before, so much in haste had they been to appease their appetite) they remarked that the Indian had not obtained the food which they had eat-

en without running serious dangers ; in fact, Curumilla bore on his face, shoulders and chest grave wounds, made by the talons and beaks of the eagles which had bravely defended their provisions.

With that Indian stoicism which nothing can equal, Curumilla calmly and silently staunched the blood which ran from his wounds, disdaining to complain and appearing annoyed at the uneasiness his companions gave witness of.

When the repast was over, Brandard uttered a sonorous hem and began smoking his pipe ; the others did likewise, soon the hunters disappeared amid a thick cloud of tobacco smoke.

‘ Friends,’ said the old hunter, ‘ God has come to our aid as He ever does when one has firm faith in His omnipotence : He has deigned to furnish us with the means of recuperating the forces which already nearly abandoned us ; do not let us, therefore, be disheartened ; to-morrow we will leave behind us this prison of rocks which we are now in ; when you have finished your pipes, lie down and sleep : I will arouse you when the time comes : when the hour of departure arrives you must be ready to undertake a long journey. We have still four hours of day yet, let us profit by them, for I warn you, we will have much to do to-night.’

And, joining example to precept, Brandard shook the ashes from his ~~calumet~~, stuck it in his belt, stretched himself on the ground and fell almost immediately asleep.

The others no doubt found his advice good, for they followed it without hesitation.

Ten minutes afterwards, except Curumilla, every one slumbered in the camp.

How long the two brothers had slept, they did not know when their uncle aroused them, all was darkness around.

The sky, be-gemmed with an infinite number of stars, was above their heads a dark blue vault ; the pale moon, motionless in ether, seemed to swim in an ocean of vapor and illuminated the country with its melancholy beams which impressed objects with a fantastic appearance.

‘ Up on your feet !’ whispered Brandard touching his nephews on the shoulder one after the other.

‘ Are we going ?’ asked Edward Clarkson rising as if moved by a spring.

‘ Yes,’ was the old hunter’s sole reply. Soon they were all ready to start.

'Forward!' said Brandard, 'let us profit by the gloom; our enemies are no doubt watching around us.'

With a gesture, the hunter assembled his companions around him.

'Hark ye,' said he, 'before attempting the bold enterprize I have conceived, I wish to have your whole assent. Our position is hopeless: to remain longer here is to die; to die of cold, hunger, thirst, and misery, after enduring, I know not how many days of intolerable suffering; you are convinced of that, are you not?'

'Yes,' replied they in one voice.

'Well,' resumed he, 'to try longer to find again the road we have lost would be a mad undertaking, and one which would have no chance of success.'

'Yes,' said they again.

The old hunter continued:

'Well,' said he, 'it is a thing as mad that I essay this time; but, if this attempt fails, we will be killed outright, without suffering; if we succeed by a miracle, for it is almost a miracle which I expect from God's inexhaustible bounty, we will be saved. Reflect well before replying. My friends, are you firmly resolved to follow me and obey me in all I order, without hesitation or murmur? to make, in short, entire abnegation of your will to be only directed by mine? Answer'

The hunters exchanged a look.

'Command, uncle,' said Edward Clarkson, 'we have sworn to follow and obey you, whatever arrived, and we swear so once more.'

'I have your promise, and will accomplish mine.' With a gesture full of majesty, the old backwoodsman uncovered, and said, raising his eyes to heaven: "Lord, our life is in Thy hands; we confide in Thy justice and bounty." Then, turning to his companions, he added in a firm voice:

'Come, let us go; mind, the utmost silence.'

The hunters advanced in Indian file; the old trapper led the march; Curumilla closed it.

On that obscure night, it was not certainly an easy thing to guide themselves among that chaos of crags, whose jutting points showed here and there fathomless abysses, at the bottom of which they could vaguely hear the murmuring of invisible water.

A false step was mortal.

Nevertheless, Brandard advanced with almost as much

assurance as if he had been travelling by the light of a dazzling sun in the broadest path of the prairies, turning to the right, then again to the left, clambering over a rock, or slipping down an almost perpendicular steep, without ever hesitating or turning to his companions, to whom he said only at times in a low voice the one word :

‘ Courage !’

They marched thus for full two hours, without other word than the above being exchanged between them.

After a long descent, during which they had twenty times run the risk of rolling to the bottom of precipices, Brandard made a sign for those following to stop.

They cast an anxious look about them. They found themselves, so to say, balanced on a point of rock. Around them was darkness. It overlooked an abyss of measureless depth.

The mountain, cut as if by a giant’s sword, was separated into two parts, in the midst of which extended a yawning gulf of some fifteen or twenty feet across.

‘ Over here we are to go,’ said Brandard, ‘ I give you ten minutes to recover wind and prepare.’

‘ Here,’ cried Edward in astonishment, ‘ why, I see nothing but precipices on either side.’

‘ Well,’ replied Brandard, ‘ we will cross here.’

The young man shook his head in discouragement.

Brandard smiled. ‘ Do you know where we are ?’ said he.

‘ No,’ rejoined his companions.

‘ I will tell you ; this spot is celebrated among the redskins and the prairie rovers ; perhaps you yourselves have heard it many times spoken of before you ever thought you would find yourselves so near it ; they call it *el mal Paso*, (the evil Pass,) on account of the precipice which cuts the mountain in two and interrupts communications with the opposite side.’

‘ Well ?’ said the brothers in a breath.

‘ Well, a few hours ago, from the top of the peak, while I was watching those two travellers whom we perceived on the Santa Fe road, my eyes chanced upon the mal Paso ; then I saw that a chance of safety was ours, and that before giving up hopelessly we ought to try to cross the mal Paso.’

‘ So,’ demanded Edward, shuddering, ‘ you have determined on such an insane undertaking ?’

‘ I have.’

‘ But it is tempting heaven !’

‘ No, it is only asking a miracle. Believe me, my dear nephew

Providence never abandons those who put their whole trust in Him ; He will come to our aid.'

'But—'

'Enough,' said the old hunter firmly, 'you have sworn to obey me ; keep your oath as well as I do mine.'

The hunter advanced to the edge of the rocky platform, and hung over the brink, his eyes fixed before him with strange tenacity.

The lookers-on followed his movements without understanding them. After having remained some moments motionless, the hunter came back, saying :

'All is well.'

Then he unwound his lasso from about his waist and commenced coiling it up in his right hand.

Curumilla smiled ; the Indian had comprehended what Brandard wished to do , without speaking, as was his custom, he detached his lasso and imitated his friend's movements.

'Good !' said Brandard with an approving smile.

The two men put their right leg forward, bent their bodies and swung their lassoes above their heads.

At a given signal, the lassoes went whistling from their hands.

Brandard and Curumilla had kept one end in their hands ; they pulled towards them but the lassoes held ; notwithstanding all their efforts. they could not disengage them.

The old hunter uttered an exclamation of joy, he had succeeded. He tied the two lassoes together after twisting them, rolled them around a rock and knotted them firmly.

Turning towards his nephew's, he said :

'There's a bridge.'

Brandard and Curumilla had thrown their lassoes over a rock which the running nooses had encircled, so that communication with the opposite side of the precipice was established, but this communication, this 'bridge' as Brandard had said consisted only of two leather cords no thicker than your index finger, stretching over a precipice of unknown profundity, which must be traversed by strength of wrist.

Decidedly, before risking oneself on that strange road, there was matter of reflection, for even the bravest man To go, suspended by the hands only, a distance of twenty feet, was no way tempting on that dark night, on a cord which might break or untie. The hunters hesitated.

'Well,' said their uncle, 'shall we not go ?'

No one answered.

'You wish to know if my bridge is secure, I suppose,' said Brandard. 'Well, see!'

Then, with his ordinary calmness, the hunter strode to the edge of the gulf. On reaching the lassoes, he grasped them with both hands and gently without jerking them, he crossed the precipice and, when touching the other side, turned and came back to his nephews.

The latter had followed him with an uneasy look, and oppressed breast, shuddering despite themselves at their second father's cool risking of danger.

'I hope,' said he leaping on the platform, 'I hope that now you are certain the lassoes will hold, and will hesitate no more.'

Without a word, Curumilla crossed the abyss.

'One,' laughingly said the hunter, 'it's no difficult matter. Who next?'

'I,' said Harry Clarkson crossing.

'Come, Edward,' said the hunter, 'I should pass over the last.'

The young man shook his head gloomily.

'I cannot do it,' muttered he.

CHAPTER VIII.

SELF-DEVOTION.

BRANDARD believed he had not heard aright.

'What?' said he bending towards his nephew.

'I can never cross that,' returned the latter.

The hunter regarded him in astonishment. He had seen his nephew fight under his eye, had known of too many circumstances in which he had shown his courage to doubt it now.

'Why?' inquired he.

The young man rose from his sitting posture, took his uncle's hand and, nailing his mouth to his ear as he cast a frightened glance around him, said in a low and concentrated tone:

'Because I am afraid!'

At this avowal which he was far from expecting, Brandard made a start of surprise, and, examining his nephew with the greatest care, replied:

'What do you mean?'

'I am afraid,' repeated the young man; 'yes, I understand,' added he an instant after with a sigh, 'that seems strange to you, you who have seen me brave the greatest perils, I in whom nothing seemed to cause fear? But it is so, I am afraid; I know not why, but the simple idea of crossing that space upheld only by a thin cord which may break with my weight, causes me an invincible terror, ridiculous be it, which despite myself makes me shiver with dread; that death seems so hideous, that I will not expose myself to it.'

While the young man was speaking, the old hunter had been watching him with extreme attention. His nephew was no longer the same man as heretofore; his brow was pale, his face ran sweat, a convulsive tremor agitated his limbs, his voice was hollow and his words broken.

'Bah! said Brandard forcing a smile; 'it is nothing, a little will and you will become master of this terror which is nothing more than vertigo. What would the Unicorn say if he saw an adopted brother of the tribe afflicted like you are now with dizziness.'

'I do not know what it is, I cannot say; only I assert that it is morally impossible for me to overcome this sentiment which governs me.'

'Come.'

'All effort is useless; the more I try, meseems my terror increases in proportion to my attempts.'

'What! you so brave?'

'Uncle,' replied Edward, smiling sadly, 'courage depends on the nerves; it is no more possible for a man to be constantly brave than for another to be constantly cowardly; there are days when the most fearless man experiences dread; I have now one of those periods; that is all.'

'Come, Edward, reflect; you cannot stay here; to go back is impossible; so make a virtue of necessity.'

'All that you have told me, uncle,' interposed the young man, 'I said to myself; and, I repeat to you, rather than venture on that cord, I will kill myself.'

'But that would be folly! cried the old hunter; 'you lack common sense.'

'It is as you say I see well enough how ridiculous I am, but the feeling is stronger than myself.'

Brandard stamped his foot in anger, and glanced to the side where the two others were looking on, without knowing to what to attribute this incomprehensible delay.

‘But, nephew,’ said the old man, ‘I could not abandon any man, much less one of my own blood, with whom I have shared dangers, cold, heat, hunger, and thirst; there are too many reasons which bind us together for us to part thus. If it is really impossible for you to cross that place the same way as our comrades have done, well, I and Curumilla will find out some way.’

‘I thank you, uncle,’ sadly replied Edward, shaking the old hunter’s hand, ‘but leave me here; whatever God pleases shall be my fate; our companions are growing impatient, time presses, go you must.’

‘But remember your oath, Edward,’ cried Brandard; ‘you must come with us.’

‘No, I cannot; you or Harry can accomplish my vow; I tell you I cannot cross.’

‘Try.’

‘It is useless, I feel my heart fail me. Farewell, uncle.’

Brandard did not reply, he was reflecting. The next instant he raised his head, his eyes sparkling with joy.

‘I knew well enough I could find a means!’ exclaimed he, gaily. ‘You will be enabled to cross as easily as if you were in a coach. Stay still here: in a few minutes I will be back; a little time is all I ask to prepare what I want.’

He grasped the cord and reached the other side.

When Edward Clarkson saw him there, he undid the lasso from the rock, and flung it to the other bank.

‘What are you doing? Stop!’ cried the lookers-on, in a stupor mingled with fright.

The young man hung over the precipice, holding by his left hand on a jutting point.

‘Our trail must be broken, so I have untied the lasso,’ replied he, ‘farewell, Harry; farewell, uncle; do my part of the oath, and heaven aid ye!’

An explosion was heard repeated by innumerable echoes, and the devoted man’s corpse rolled down the abyss, leaping with a hollow sound from the protruding points of rocks.

Edward Clarkson had blown out his brains.*

The spectators remained horrorstruck at this unexpected sequel to the strange scene.

They could not understand why, from the fear of being killed crossing a precipice, the young man preferred committing

*This episode, scarcely credible as it may appear, is strictly historical.
(The Author.)

suicide. Nevertheless, Edward Clarkson's action was logical in itself; it was not death but the manner of dying which made him fear, and as he was sure that it was impossible for him to follow the road taken by his companions, he had preferred to put an end to the delay.

And besides, the brave young man had, in dying, rendered them an immense service; thanks to him, their traces had disappeared so completely that it was impossible for those whom they pursued to discover their whereabouts, if by chance their scouts should come near them.

The three hunters, albeit they were now clear of the fatal circle into which Sutter's cunning had drawn them, found themselves still in an excessively critical position; they must descend if possible into the plain to discover some road; therefore, as often happens in the wilds of the West, all sentiment was promptly overcome by necessity which still held them in its iron hand; the common danger aroused in them that instinct of preservation which in man, whatever comes, never more than sleeps.

Brandard was the first, and Harry Clarkson the last, to master his grief and resume over his feelings that empire which he had seldom released.

'Come, come,' said the old hunter, shaking his head, as if to drive away the sad ideas which would come to his mind, 'as the Spaniards say: "*Cosa que no tiene remedio olvidarla es la mejor*, (That which has no remedy, it is best to forget.)" Edward has quitted us for a better world; God does all for the best; our regrets cannot give back life to his corpse; let us think of ourselves, we are not yet on a bed of roses, and if we do not hasten, may risk soon joining him. Come, be a man, Harry.'

The latter dried his eyes which he could not prevent becoming humid, for he was yet a young man, and had not his uncle's self-command, which the most tragical events alone seemed to touch. 'Well, I am ready,' said he.

'That's right. It is time courage returns to us, for the hardest part of our work is not done yet. Some yards below us, you perceive a level platform from which commences an inextricable forest which descends to the foot of the precipice, the base of the mountain.'

'Yes, I see it.'

'There is our road.'

'What, our road?' cried Harry; 'how can we reach the ~~road~~ form you speak of?'

• In a simple way ; by means of my lasso you can go down.'

' That is true ; for Curumilla and me that is easy ; but how will you join us ?'

' That need not disquiet you.'

' Very well, but permit me to observe——'

' What ?'

' That here before us,' said Harry pointing, ' here is a road, it seems to me easy of access.'

' Indeed,' replied the old hunter coolly, ' what you say is true ; but two reasons prevent my taking that road as you call it.'

' And these two reasons ?'

' I will tell you : firstly, that road is so easy to be followed that I am certain that, if those men we are after are near here and watching, old Sutter's suspicions are directed towards that, if the devil has permitted him to reach the spot.'

' And the second ?'

' The second is this,' resumed Brandard : ' apart from the incontestable advantages which we procure by the descent I propose to you, and I am certain you think like me, I do not wish, Harry, to leave your poor brother's body at the bottom of that precipice without burial, to become the prey of wild beasts ; that is my second reason, how do you find it ?'

' As I might have expected from your noble heart, uncle ; I go when you will.'

' Good ; but as the night is dark and the road is rather dangerous, Curumilla will go the first and show the lead.'

The Indian made an affirmative sign ; Brandard clung with his hands and feet to a rock, made two turns of his lasso about his body and let the end drop over the edge of the rock ; then he made the Indian a sign to descend.

The latter required no repetition of the sign, he grasped the cord and steadyng himself by the anfractuosities of the rocks, he lowered himself by degrees and in a few minutes arrived without accident on the inferior platform.

The old hunter and his nephew had followed with an attentive eye the Indian's movements. When they saw him safe and sound on the rock, they emitted a sigh of relief and Harry descended in his turn.

Brandard remained alone ; consequently no one could hold the lasso and render him the service he had filled for his companions ; but the old hunter was a man of resources, he was but seldom embarrassed. He pulled up the cord, passed it around the rock so that each end was equal and the lasso was

double ; then, seizing the doubled lasso with his hands, he slipped slowly down it and reached his companions. Then he un-twisted the lasso, pulled one end towards him, rolled it up and attached it to his belt.

'We must now,' said he, turning to his nephew, 'look around and see where we are.'

He immediately made the circuit of the flat rock they were standing on. It was much larger than the upper rock they had quitted. At the end of it began the virgin forest which descended in a gentle slope to the bottom of the valley. When Brandard had scrutinized the surrounding country he rejoined his companions, shaking his head.

'What is it, uncle?' asked Harry Clarkson; 'have you seen anything suspicious?'

'Hum?' said the old hunter; 'I am much in the wrong, if in the neighborhood we do not find the den of some wild beast.'

'A wild beast?' cried the young man; 'at this height?'

Yes, and that is what makes me the more uneasy. The tracks are large and deep. Curumilla, see yourself,' added he turning towards the Indian and indicating with a gesture the place he wished examined.

Without replying, the chief bent over the ground and examined the imprints attentively.

'What animal do you believe it is, uncle?' inquired Harry.

'A grizzly bear,' returned Brandard.

The grizzly bear is the most feared and unconquerable animal of America; Harry could not repress a start of terror on hearing the name.

'But,' added Brandard, 'here's the chief coming back, all our doubts will be cleared up. Well, chief, what has made those tracks?'

'A grizzly bear,' laconically replied Curumilla.

'I was sure,' said Brandard, 'and what is more, the animal is large.'

'Very large: the tracks are eight inches broad.'

'Oh, oh,' said the young man, 'it is a rough neighbor we have here. But in what state are the prints, chief.'

'Fresh: the animal passed about an hour ago.'

'Yes, and there's his den!' cried Brandard suddenly, pointing to a large cavern in the mountain.

'Harry,' resumed Brandard, 'do you care more than I to meet the bear?'

'Certainly not!'

‘ Well we must not stay longer here ; the animal has doubtless gone forth for his breakfast and will not be slow to return : let us not wait, but profit by his absence.’

‘ Let us go !’ exclaimed Harry, who though of proved bravery, did not desire to find himself in face of such an animal.

Suddenly a sound of breaking twigs was heard in the forest, and a formidable growl disturbed the silence of the night.

‘ It is too late !’ said Brandard, ‘ here’s the enemy ; now we cannot escape.’

The three men fell back until they were stopped by the rock.

A few minutes passed when the hideous head of a grizzly bear appeared between the trees at the edge of the platform.

‘ We are lost !’ muttered Harry Clarkson, cocking his rifle, ‘ for on this rock all flight is impossible.’

‘ Who knows ?’ returned Brandard. ‘ God has done so much for us, that we should be ungrateful to suppose that He would leave us on this new peril.’

CHAPTER IX.

A CAMP IN THE MOUNTAINS.

AFTER the skirmish with the white hunters and the Unicorn’s warriors, from whom they had escaped, Sutter and his gang had started for the mountains.

Sutter was one of those old overrunners of the prairie to whom all the stratagems of woodcraft were known. After the conflict with his foes, he had learned enough from their actions to know that he was assailed by them for some guilty deed of his, which one he knew not for certain, but the sight of Delarue, Brandard and the Clarksons, whom he had seen when he and his sons had been flogged for horsteal, led him to be almost sure that it was on account of his attack on the little settlement on the Canadian River. He had had the good fortune to reach the Sierra de los Comanches in time to dissemble his traces.

Then, for more than a month, had taken place between him and Brandard an assault of expedients and cunning wherein each one had displayed all the skill their minds could furnish to deceive his adversary and throw him off the scent.

For more than a month, we repeat, the two men had been turning incessantly around each other in a circle of less than ten leagues, and often were separated by nothing more than a screen of foliage or a ravine. But such a contest must sooner or later have an end, and discouragement began to weigh on Sutter who would have risked an encounter had he known that his antagonists were only four in number.

This is the position in which we find Sutter at the moment when the requirements of this tale oblige us to return to him.

It was eight o'clock of the evening; several men, clustered around a low fire, cast at times around them a hopeless and desolate look at the sombre gorges of the mountain. These persons were Sutter's two sons, Dog's-face, Pepito and Simon Munez.

The place in which we find them was one of those narrow ravines, the bed of dried-up torrents, so often to be met with in the Sierra de los Comanches. Along the sides of the ravine extend to the right and left, thick woods, overtopped by the trees of a gloomy virgin forest, from the mysterious profundities of which come at intervals the yells and prolonged howls of wild beasts.

The situation of the bandits was most critical.

Lost for more than a month in those arid mountains, tracked on every side, they had hitherto escaped their pursuers by great sacrifices and the prodigies of skill shown by old Sutter.

The pursuit had been so pressing that, continually on the point of being surprised by their enemies, they had not even ventured to hunt the rare game which, as it were to mock them, bounded betimes a few yards from them.

A gunshot, by revealing the direction wherein they were, would have sufficed to discover them.

The small quantity of provisions which they had snatched up on leaving their retreat, had not been slow, notwithstanding their economy, to disappear.

Then hunger, more than that, thirst had shown itself. Of all the scourges which afflict unfortunate travellers, thirst is without contradiction, the most terrible.

Their provisions having given out, others must be had; in those mountains, that was nearly impossible, especially when the fugitives were deprived of liberty of action.

They had managed however, for some days, to live on roots, berries and some game knocked over by sticks.

Unfortunately, cold became every day more piercing, the birds had retired to less chilly regions : that resource failed them. The little water left them had been confided to the youngest of the Sutters who was charged to keep it until the last.

His companions had found no other method of withstanding thirst than to cut the ears of their horses and drink the blood.

Then they killed a horse, which could obtain no more nourishment than its masters. The animals roasted flesh had enabled them to pass two or three more days. The other horses were then devoured, one after another. Now, there remained nothing to the bandits ; for two long days they had not eaten.

So they kept a mournful silence and flung around ferocious looks, sinking deeper and deeper in sinister reflections.

They felt their minds moving in their brains, throbbing as if they would escape and make room for madness ; they knew the moment approached when they would no longer be masters of their reason and become the prey of the fearful fantasy which already pressed their temples as with a steel band and made dance before their fever-burned eyes the most dazzling mirages.

A heart-rending spectacle was that presented, in that solitary and mournful desert, of men lying bereft of strength around a dull, expiring fire.

Time passed, the wind came soughing lugubriously in the quebradas ; the watery moon half drowned in a mass of vapor, gleamed in long beams, at rare intervals illuminating this scene of desolation with a fantasti and uncertain light of which the ominous silence was broken by naught save a stifled blasphemy or a groan forced out by pain.

‘ Courage,’ murmured Nathan Sutter, ‘ father has given his word that he would save us from this place.’

‘ Where is he ? Since this morning, at break of day, he left us to go, the devil knows where !’ said Pepito whose face was sunken and sallow ; ‘ night has fallen on us since long ago, and you see yourself, he has not returned.’

‘ What do you mean by that ?’

‘ *Canario !* that proves he has gone for good.’

‘ Silence, wretch !’ abruptly cried Nathan rising ; ‘ don’t insult my father. You know him but badly if you judge him capable of such cowardice.’

‘ Hum ! in the position we are in, it is almost excusable to do so.’

'Perhaps he would indeed have done so,' resumed Sutter quickly, 'if he had no other companions than you, *caballero*; but he has two sons here, and my father is not the man to abandon his flesh and blood in peril.'

'Well spoken, Nat!' exclaimed his brother.

'But peace, Pepito! If we must die here like dogs, let us at least die quietly; that is not much to ask for, I should say.'

'Oh, how I suffer!' groaned Simon Munez writhing in agony on the ground.

The bearer of the water approached the sufferer and touched his lips with the gourd, saying:

'Drink!'

Simon made a movement to swallow some water; but at the same instant, he repulsed it shaking his head.

'No,' said he, 'keep that, it is our own lives you are about giving away.'

'Drink, I say.'

'No,' replied he firmly, 'we may all need by and by, and 'tis better to suffer a little now, until we hear of your father.'

The young man returned to his place, took some buffalo horns, stood them before him, and filled them with water; finally he unsheathed his hunting-knife, pressed the point to the gourd and said to the bandits who had watched him without understanding his actions:

'There's the water, every one of you must drink! I swear that if you do not instantly obey me, I will cut this gourd, and then all will be lost.'

His companions looked on, consulting each other with a look.

'For the last time, will you drink, yes or no?' said Sutter pressing the point of his knife resolutely against the vessel.

'Stop!' cried Simon Munez springing to the place. 'Demônios! we will do as you say.' And snatching up the buffalo horn he emptied it at a draught.

His companions did likewise, uttering an 'ah!' of satisfaction as they threw down the buffalo horns.

An hour passed without a revival of their tortures, but, although free of the pangs of thirst, hunger still gnawed them.

'It is very extraordinary,' began Pepito, whose quarrelsome disposition was more than ever aroused; 'it is very extraordinary that your father does not return.'

'What, senor? do you again accuse a friend who has so often and for so long a while given you proofs of his trueness.'

How do you know that he is not absent to ensure our safety?"

"Well spoken, my boy!" cried a harsh voice; "thank you, my son!"

The bandits turned shuddering despite themselves.

At this moment, the bushes were parted by a firm hand, a heavy footfall resounded on the stony bottom of the ravine and a man appeared.

It was John Sutter.

He carried a deer on his back. When within the circle of light cast from the fire, he stopped, threw down his burden, and leaning on his rifle whose butt he struck roughly on the ground, flung a sardonic glance around.

"Oh!" laughed he, "I've come just in time it appears, Don Pepito. *Viva Dios!* you are arranging things finely, meseems in my absence; is this the way you understand Christian charity, *compadre!* *Cristo!* I must compliment you."

Rosario, stupefied with the sudden appearance and rude apostrophe, said not a word.

Sutter continued:

"I am a better comrade than you, for I bring you something to eat, and it was not without trouble I killed the cursed animal, let me tell you. Come, come, hurry and roast a quarter!"

Richard and Nathan Sutter had forestalled their worthy parent's order; some minutes before they had began to skin and prepare the deersmeat.

"But," observed Nathan, "to roast this venison we must make the fire larger—and what of those watching us?"

"That is one danger," responded his father.

"What do you think?" inquired Dog'sface.

"I, it is the same to me either way; I wish you all to know one thing: those who pursue us are so earnest and interested that I am convinced that we will fall into their hands, so I care but very little whether it is now or ten days from this."

"The deuce! you are not very encouraging, *compadre!*" cried Simon Munez. "Has courage failed you completely, or have you come across some suspicious trails?"

"Courage never fails me, Senor Munez—I know too well the fate reserved to me. As for suspicious trails one must be blind not to see them."

"So there is no hope!" exclaimed the men in undisguised terror.

'Sooth to say, no, I believe not; but,' added the old bandit, 'why do you not roast that quarter of deer? You said you were dying of hunger.'

'That is true. But what you have announced kills appetite and entirely destroys the pleasure of eating,' said Simon Munez sadly.

'Well, to try to return you the pleasure of eating, as Simon says,' began Sutter after an instant's reflection, 'I tell you there is perhaps a way of escaping.'

'What is it?' cried they all grouping round him.

'It is very precarious, dangerous, and may not after all, succeed.'

'Tell it at all events,' persisted Pepito.

'Yes, yes, speak,' said the others.

'You want to hear it?'

'Yes, yes.'

'Well, then, listen to me with attention, for the means I propose, odd as it may at first appear to you, offers chances of success which in our hopeless situation, are not to be disdained.'

'Speak, will you?' said Pepito angrily.

Sutter laughed.

'You are very eager,' said he, 'perhaps soon you will not be so pressing.'

CHAPTER X.

A GAME OF CHANCE.

'BEFORE showing you my project,' resumed John Sutter, 'I will first of all explain to you what is really our position, so that when I explain to you the means I would employ, you may decide with full acquaintance with the state of our affairs;

The bandits nodded assent, but said nothing.

'We are surrounded on all sides,' continued their leader: 'first: by the Comanches, commanded by the Unicorn, who have two causes of grief against us, one our having been leagued with the Apaches and participated in their attacks on their enemies, the other because we killed their warriors at our last skirmish when we escaped them and the white hunters. Enfeebled as we are by horrible privations which we have suf-

fered since we entered these mountains, we cannot make a way through the sierra, which is our second obstacle, or the white hunters which bar us on the third side. We must renounce all hope of freeing ourselves by main strength.'

'What is to be done then?' said Pepito Rosario; 'it is evident that at any price we must escape; every second we spend here cuts off a chance of evading our pursuers.'

'I am as well convinced of that as you are, and even better. My long day's absence had a double aim: first that of procuring food and you see I have done so.'

'True enough.'

'Next,' resumed the bandit, 'to learn positively the points occupied by the enemy.'

'I have succeeded: I went without discovery near the Comanche camps: they keep a good guard and it would be folly to try to pass unperceived through the midst of them; they form around us a vast half-circle of which we are the centre; this circle continually grows smaller, insomuch that in two or three days, perhaps before then, we will find the Comanches so close that it will be impossible to elude them and we will infallibly fall into their hands.'

'*Demonios!*' ejaculated Don Pepito Rosario, 'this perspective is not pleasant, those red devils, who will take pleasure in torturing us in every possible manner, known and unknown. Hum! the sole thought of falling into their hands is enough to make one's skin creep; I know what Indians are capable of in the way of tortures, I have often seen them at work and require no further information in that respect.'

'Very well; I do not, therefore, insist on that point.'

'That would be utterly useless. You would do better to let us know the plan which you have conceived and which you say, may save us.'

'I said no such thing; I only told you that it offered some chance of success.'

'We are in no situation to cavil on words,' said Nathan Sutter, 'come, father, let us have your project.'

'This is it.'

The bandits lent the ear with the fullest attention.

'It is evident,' continued John Sutter, 'that if we stay together, and endeavor to flee all the same way, we will without fail be lost, supposing, which is likely, that our tracks are discovered by those who pursue us.'

'Well, well,' grumbled Dog'sface, 'go on: I cannot understand yet what you are driving at.'

'I have reflected on that inconvenience, and this is the combination I have found.'

'Let us hear the combination.'

'It is very simple ; we must make a *double trail*.'

'Hum, a double trail ! that is, a false and a true one. That plan seems a poor one to me.'

'Why so ?' said Sutter, with his sneering smile

'Why, because there must be a point where the false trail confounds with the real one, and —'

'You are wrong, compadre,' interrupted the leader of the bandits, 'the two trails must both be real, otherwise the plan would be absurd.'

'I am more out of the way than ever, then ; explain.'

'I ask nothing better, if you will let me speak. One of us must devote himself for the others ; while we fly one side, he will try to escape by the other, doing his best, while dissembling his tracks, to lead the enemy his way. In that fashion, he will open a passage for us through which we may pass without being discovered. Do you understand now ?'

'Caspita ! do I understand — I should think so ! the idea is magnificent !' cried Pepito Rosario, enthusiastically.

'There is nothing more but to put it into execution.'

'Yes, and without delay.'

'Very well. Who offers himself to save his comrades ?'

Not a word.

'Well,' resumed old Sutter, 'you keep silence. Come, Don Pepito, you so eager awhile ago, not a movement ?'

'Thank you, compadre ! I never thought myself a martyr. Oh, I am not ambitious.'

'We must get out of this.'

'Caramba, I ask nothing better ! still I do not wish it to be at the expense of my skin or my scalp.'

Sutter reflected a moment. The adventurers watched him in anxiety, waiting in silence till he had found the solution of this problem so difficult to unravel.

The old rover of the prairies raised his head.

'Humph !' said he, 'all discussion is useless ; you are not men to be affected with sentiments.'

They made an affirmative gesture.

'Here is what we must do ; we will leave to fate the task of choosing the man ; he whom fate designates will obey without murmuring. Do you agree ?'

'As it must be finished,' said Nathan, 'the sooner the better as well this way as another, I do not oppose it.'

'Nor I,' said his brother Richard.

'Nor I,' repeated Dog'sface.

'Bah!' cried Pepito Rosario, 'I always had good luck with games of chance.'

'And I always lost when the stakes were money,' said Simon Munez, 'but now they being this trumpery life, I am ~~sure~~ to get clear.'

'So, all are agreed, you swear that the one on whom the choice falls will obey without hesitation, and do his duty conscientiously?'

'We swear!' exclaimed they all in one voice. 'Go on, and terminate.'

'Yes,' said Sutter, 'but in what way will we consult fate?'

'That need not trouble you, comadre,' said Pepito, laughing, 'I am a man of precaution.'

Thus saying, Rosario fumbled in his vaquero boots, and drew out a pack of greasy and creased cards.

'There's what we want,' continued he, with a triumphant air. 'Dick, here, will shuffle the cards. one of us will cut, and he will deal them out one by one, and whoever gets the *dos de espadas*, (two of spades) will make the second trail. Does that suit you?'

'Admirably,' replied they all.

Richard Sutter took the cards from the Spaniard's hand, and shuffled them for several minutes.

A zarape (blanket) had been spread out on the ground beside the fire, that they might distinguish the color and spots on the cards.

'Cut,' said he, laying the pack on the zarape.

Rosario extended his hand.

Sutter thrust his before it with a smile.

'One moment,' said he, 'these are your own cards, and I know your talent as a player; let me cut.'

'As you please!' replied the Spaniard with a grimace of disappointment.

The old bandit cut, and his son commenced to give each one a card.

There was really something strange in the aspect of that scene.

On a dark night at the bottom of that desolate gorge, to the sound of the wind which moaned in fitful gusts, these four men bent forward watching anxiously that young man who, by the changing and capricious flickering of the firelight, seemed ac-

complishing some nameless cabalistic work, the frowning expression of the features of these men who staked at this moment their life on the turning of a card — certainly, the stranger who had witnessed this extraordinary spectacle would have believed himself a prey to an hallucination.

With frowning brows, pale face and heaving breasts, they followed with feverish eyes each card as it fell, wiping away at intervals the icy sweat which beaded their foreheads.

The cards kept falling, the two of spades had not yet turned up ; Richard Sutter had no more than a dozen cards in his hand.

‘ Ah !’ said Rosario drawing a long breath, ‘ it’s a long while coming.’

‘ Pho !’ laughed Sutter, ‘ perhaps some one will find it too short.’

‘ It is I,’ said Nathan in a choking voice.

In fact, the dos de espadas fell before him.

Every one breathed freely.

‘ So !’ said Pepito clapping him on the shoulder, ‘ I felicitate you, Nathan, my friend ; you are charged with a fine mission !’

‘ Will you do it in my place ?’ retorted the other.

‘ I am not sorry to have missed the honor of saving you,’ said Don Pepito coolly.

Nathan glanced fiercely at him, snapped his fingers and turned his back on him.

Rosario picked up the cards and replaced them in his vaquero boots with evident satisfaction.

‘ Hum !’ muttered he, ‘ they may yet be of use : one never knows in what circumstance chance may place us.’

After this philosophical reflection, the Spaniard, laughing inwardly at the certainty of not being obliged to sacrifice himself for his friends, reseated himself tranquilly by the fire.

Sutter, who had not lost sight of the execution of his project, had laid some venison steaks on the coals that his companions might gain the strength requisite for them to support the fatigue in store for them.

As usually happens in such cases, the repast was a silent one ; each man, absorbed in his thoughts ate rapidly without thinking to begin or sustain a conversation.

It was bordering on five o’clock of the morning, the sky commenced to take that opal tint which announces the dawn of day.

Sutter rose, and imitated him.

‘Come, lad,’ said he to Nathan, ‘are you ready ? This is the hour.’

‘I will start when you say, father ?’ rejoined the young man resolutely. ‘I am only awaiting your last instructions, that I may know what direction I ought to take and in what place I will find you again if, which is not likely, I have the luck to go scot free.’

‘My instructions are not long, lad. You will go towards the Northwest, which is the shortest road to Independance, which if you reach it, you will be safe. From thence you can go to our old cave in Three Oak Hollow, which you can clean out and hide in while awaiting us. I advise you above everything, to conceal your trail as well as possible ; too broad a track would give our pursuers suspicion and completely thwart our design. You understand, don’t you, Nat ?’

‘Perfectly.’

‘I depend on you ; you too well know life in the wilderness to be wiped out easily ; you have a good rifle, powder and balls so luck to you, my boy ! Don’t forget to draw our enemies after you.’

‘Be easy,’ returned Nathan sullenly ; ‘I’m not an idiot.’

‘Well, take a quarter of deersmeat, and go. Vamose !’

Nathan shouldered his rifle, took the venison which he hung to his belt, and strode away without once turning around. Five minutes afterwards, he disappeared among the shrubs.

‘Poor Nat,’ muttered Richard, ‘he is going to a certain death.’

‘We are all going to death,’ said his father who had heard his words ; ‘why should we pity the fate which menaces him ? do we know what awaits us ? Let us think of ourselves ; we require all our skill and sagacity to get clear, for I dare not reckon on a miracle.’

‘That is much more prudent,’ returned Munez ; ‘besides, I heard some one in the settlements say : “help yourself, heaven will aid you.”’

‘Yes,’ said the old bandit laughing, ‘and never had anybody more occasion to put that precept into practice.’

‘I believe you, and am waiting, like the rest, for you to explain what you are going to do.’

‘Well then, do you feel yourselves strong enough to follow me ?’

‘Yes, where you go, we will.’

'But this time it is probably the first you ever travelled in the way we must to-day.'

'What do you mean? we have all gone on foot, on horse-back, or in canoes.'

'You are right, but we have no horses, our foes have possession of the ground and there is no river.'

'Then,' cried Pepito laughing, 'we will be like the birds, we will fly in the air.'

Sutter eyed him seriously.

'You have nearly guessed it,' said he.

'What?' said the Spaniard. 'You are mocking me; do you call this a moment well suited for jesting?'

'I am very little inclined to jokes at any time,' coldly returned the American, 'at present less than ever. We will not fly in the air like birds, for we have no wings, but, in spite of that, it is in the air lies our road. Look about you: to the right and left, on the mountain slopes are immense forests; our enemies are hidden there. They are coming quietly, bent over the ground, following carefully up the slightest indications of our passage they may discover.'

'Well?' inquired Dog'sface.

'Well, while they seek our trail on the earth, we will slip through their hands like serpents, passing from branch to branch, from tree to tree, yards above their heads, without their thinking to uplift their eyes, which, moreover if they did so, would be completely useless: the foliage of the trees is too thick, the lianas too closely entwined, for them to be able to discover us. And then this chance of safety is the only one left us. Let us see if you have the courage to attempt it.'

There was an instant's silence.

At length Don Pepito seized Sutter's hand and shaking it forcibly, said:

'Canario, compadre! you are a great man! Pardon me for having doubted you.'

'So you accept?'

'Caspita, accept? With eagerness, and I swear to you that never squirrel has leaped like I shall do.'

CHAPTER XI.

NATHAN SUTTER.

As soon as he had disappeared from his companions' sight, Nathan stopped.

He was neither so reckless nor so light of heart as he had wished to appear.

When he was alone, far from the view of those who might laugh and sneer at him, he gave vent to his ill humor and cursed the chance which had placed him in so precarious and dangerous a position.

Nathan (who believe we have said so already) was a giant endowed with uncommon strength and unheard-of ferocity—he was, in fact, a repetition of his father. Accustomed from infancy to forest life and bloody tragedies; he was not the man to be easily disheartened; without pity for himself like for others, he accepted the consequences of the situation he was in, and, the case occurring, was resolved to fight till his last breath to keep his hair from the savages.

But at this moment, it was not his position in itself which disgusted him. A hundred times, in the prairies and forests of the West, he had seen dangers surround him; but hitherto when he risked his life, it had always been for some design whose end he saw clearly, with the perspective, near or distant, of booty or plunder; and this time, he considered himself obeying a will of which he was ignorant, and for interests which were not his own.

So he cursed against his father, Pepito Rosario, and himself for having so tamely entered into a project which he doubted he could accomplish.

His father's last recommendations were useless; Nathan had no desire of leaving his traces exposed; he made use of every method his intelligence suggested to veil them from the most clear-sighted eyes, not making a step until he was convinced that the preceding one had disappeared.

After deep reflections, he had resumed his thoughts, uttered in a loud voice, like a man accustomed to live alone :

' Well, all the worse for them, every one for himself, and the devil for us all! If I lose my scalp, they will not take it easily. I will defend myself with my best efforts, father and the rest may do what they may, as for me, I will try to get out of this scrape as soon as I can.'

After minutely examining his rifle and seeing that his knife and pistols could be disengaged in a moment, Nathan resumed his way.

Dwellers in towns and cities, accustomed to paved streets and macadamized roads bordered with houses, cannot, approximately even, form a just idea of the position of a single man in that ocean of verdure, the Far West, feeling himself watched by invisible eyes and sure that he is being tracked like a wild beast.

A man, brave though he be, no matter how long habituated to the adventurous life of the desert, shudders and turns pale when he casts about him an interrogative look and sees himself such an atom in the immensity by which he is encompassed.

In the wilderness, if one wishes to go to the north, he must move towards the south, taking care not to crush the leaves he walks on, nor break the branches which obstruct his passage, nor especially, move aside the pebbles or grass of the path he follows.

All the noises of the forest are known, explained, commented on by the redskins ; by lending the ear a few seconds, they will tell you if the animal whose tread you hear coming faintly from afar is a horse, a bear, a buffalo, an elk or an antelope.

A stone rolling down the slope of a ravine suffices to denounce some roamer.

Some drops of water spilled on the banks of a ford clearly reveals the crossing of some travellers.

An isolated movement in the high grass denounces an incautious spy.

In short from the broken reed and trodden herbage to the bison who suddenly raises his ears while browsing and to the asshalte which bounds affrighted without apparent cause : all in the desert serves as a book to the Indian for him to read the passing of a friend or an enemy and put himself in his pursuit, when the first would even be a hundred leagues from the second.

The men who live in those regions, where material life is everything, acquire a perfection of certain organs which seems beyond belief : sight and hearing especially are in them developed to enormous proportions ; which, joined to an extreme agility, courage beyond proof, sustained by muscles and nerves of a vigor out of all proportions, make them redoubtable adversaries.

To sum up what we have said, we must add that cunning

and treachery are the two great means which Indians employ to defeat their foes, whom they never attack face to face, but always by surprise.

Necessity is the red man's great law: he sacrifices all to it; and, like all incomplete or ill-developed natures, he only admits physical qualifications, excluding those virtues of which he has no need and which would but unfit him for the life which he leads.

Nathan was himself almost a savage; at long intervals only he had, for some few days solely, entered the cities of the Union to dispose of articles of plunder or horses which could not be sold at the settlements. He knew no life but what he had lived on the prairie; this education would have been worth any other, when the instincts of him who acquired it were good, because he could make a choice, taking what was noble and generous and setting aside what was evil.

Unfortunately Nathan had had no other professor of morals than his father, he was accustomed from an early hour to look upon things in the same point of view as his parent, to wit, the worst of all; insomuch that, with age, the precepts which he had received had so well fructified that he had become the true type of a civilized man turned into a savage. Nathan loved nothing, believed in nothing and respected nothing.

The young man walked on for a long time without perceiving anything which could make him suspect the approach of any danger whatever.

However, this factitious security did not make him relax his precautions. While advancing, his rifle thrust forward, his body bent and his ear ready to catch the least sound, his eyes scrutinizing the bushes and undergrowth, he was reflecting, and the further he went, the more gloomy were his reflections.

The reason was simple: he knew himself to be surrounded by implacable enemies, watched by numerous spies, and yet nothing came to trouble the calm of the prairie. Everything appeared to be in its ordinary state; it was impossible to perceive the slightest suspicious movement in the herbage or thickets.

This calmness was too profound to be natural.

'Humph!' said Nathan to himself, 'will these red devils ever give a sign of life? I am going blindfold without knowing where to; I am convinced that I will fall into some ambush laid by the wretches and will have my hair raised without a chance of preventing it.'

Nathan continued his way until ten o'clock of the morning. At that period, he felt his appetite call on him and his legs began to weary, so he resolved, cost what it might, to make a short halt, that he might eat a mouthful and take a little repose.

He mechanically looked about him in order to select a suitable place for the stoppage he proposed to make.

Suddenly he made a start of surprise, cocked his rifle and quickly sprang behind an enormous tree. He had perceived, at fifty paces from the place he was standing, an Indian crouched on the ground and peaceably munching a little pennekaun.

His first emotion passed, Nathan attentively examined the Indian. He was a man of some thirty years of age; he was not clad in the costume of warriors; the screech-owl's feather, stuck in his thick scalplock, led him to be recognized for a Pierced-nose Indian.

The adventurer considered him for a long space of time without knowing what part to take; at length, he shouldered his rifle, quitted his ambuscade, and strode towards the Indian.

The latter had probably perceived him, albeit he appeared in no way troubled by his presence, and continued to eat tranquilly.

When within a dozen paces of the Pierced-nose, the American stopped.

'I salute my brother,' said he, waving his zarape in token of peace, 'may the Wacondah grant him a good hunt.'

'I thank my pale-face brother,' rejoined the Indian raising his head, 'he is welcome; I have remaining two handfuls of pennekaun, and there is room for him by my side.'

Nathan approached, and, without further ceremony, sat down near his new friend, who fraternally shared his provisions with him, but without addressing him a question.

The red men consider it a great impoliteness to address their guests any questions whatever, when the latter do not encourage them to do so.

After having eaten, the Pierced-nose lit his Indian pipe, an action which was immediately followed by the American.

The two men remained thus, as silent as mice, reciprocally puffing smoke in each other's faces. When the Pierced-nose Indian had finished his calumet, he shook out the ashes, and thrust it into his girdle; then leaned his elbows on his knees, his head on the palm of his hands, and half closing his eyes, plunged into that state of ecstatic beatitude, which the Italians call *il dolce far niente*, the Turks the *kief*, and which has no equivalent in other languages.

Nathan replenished his pipe, lit it, and turning towards his companion, asked :

‘ Is my brother a chief ? ’

The Indian raised his head.

‘ No,’ returned he, with a smile of pride, ‘ I am one of the masters of the great medicine.’

Nathan bowed with respect.

‘ I understand,’ said he, ‘ my brother is one of those wise men whom the redskins name the *aheum* (physicians).’

‘ I am also *talam* (sorcerer),’ responded the savage.

‘ Oh, oh ! ’ said Nathan ; ‘ what ! is my brother one of the ministers of the *nim-coe* (great turtle) ? ’

‘ Yes,’ returned the other, ‘ we command the *arbop* (caziques) and *ahlabal* (warriors) ; they only act according to our orders.’

‘ I know it ; my father has much science, his power extends over the whole earth.’

The Pierced-nose Indian smiled condescendingly at these eulogies, and said, showing a light stick, adorned with vivid colored feathers and small bells, which he held in his right hand :

‘ This *mulbache* is a greater weapon than the white man’s thunder ; it makes me everywhere feared and respected.’

A strange smile for a second contracted the lips of the white, who resumed :

‘ Is my brother going to join his nation ? ’

‘ No,’ said the Indian, shaking his head ; ‘ I am expected at the *tinamit* (village) of the Bison Apaches, who have need of my counsel and medicines, in order that they may undertake under good auspices a great expedition which they meditate at this moment. My brother must, therefore, pardon my leaving him, for I am forced this evening to complete my journey.’

‘ I will not quit my red brother,’ responded Nathan, ‘ if he will permit me, I will tread in his moccasins, my way lies in the same direction as my brother’s.’

‘ I accept my brother’s proposal with joy ; we will go.’

‘ Let us start, then,’ said the American.

After having risen and adjusted his clothes, the Indian stooped to take up a small package, probably enclosing his light traveling fit-out.

Nathan profited by this moment : with a gesture as swift as lightning, he unsheathed his hunting--knife, and buried it the buck-horn haft between the Indian’s two shoulders.

The unfortunate victim emitted a smothered cry, threw up his arms and fell stiff dead.

Nathan phlegmatically plucked the knife from the horrible wound, wiped it on the grass and sheathed it.

'Humph!' said he, laughing, 'here's a pretty sorcerer who did not know much of the future; we will see if I will be more knowing than he.'

While conversing with the savage, whom he had not at first intended to kill, and of whom he wished only to make a safeguard, a sudden idea had flashed to his mind. This idea, which seemed at first sight extraordinary, suited the bandit on account of the audacity and temerity which was required to put it into execution, and to make it succeed.

It was simply to take the sorcerer's costume, and pass himself off for him among the redskins.

Having for a long while studied Indian habits and costumes, Nathan did not doubt that he could manage to play the difficult part with all the necessary perfection to deceive more clear-seeing eyes than those of the Indians.

After being assured that his victim gave no signs of life, Nathan commenced to despoil him of his vesture, which he substituted for his own.

When this first exchange was done, he examined the sorcerer's bundle, took out a looking-glass, and dried-up bladders, some of vermillion, others of a sort of black pigment, and, with little slips of wood, made upon his face, which he had first stained with a color closely imitating the Indian tint, the fantastic designs which he found on the dead man's face; this likeness was perfect; from the face he passed to his body, then arranged his hair in which he stuck the owl's feathers.

For this metamorphose to be completed, it had required but a few minutes.

'Now,' said Nathan, 'they must not find this body.'

Throwing the body on his brawny shoulders, he bore it to the brink of the precipice, and hurling it to the inaccessible depths below, said laughing:

'Now, that is done. If the Apaches will not be satisfied, with the great medicine who comes, they will be hard to please.'

As he did not wish to lose his clothes, he hid them in the Indian's bundle which he slung on his rifle barrel; he picked up the poor sorcerer's stick and went his way muttering gaily with a smile.

'We may soon see if this mulbache has the magical power that wizard attributed to it.'

CHAPTER XII.

A TRAIL IN THE AIR.

THOSE travelers and tourists who have only seen trees in parks cannot imagine the grand, sublime and majestic aspect which is presented by a virgin forest of the New World.

There all is abrupt and wild. There is no perspective, it is with difficulty that the sight can view an extent of thirty or forty paces on either side. The primitive soil disappears under the new ground of rotted fragments of trees dead of old age which time, sun and rain have reduced to powder.

The trees grow here and there at liberty, enveloped by thick lianas which wind around the trunks and boughs, forming strange parabolas, springing off in all directions, entering the ground to shoot up again a foot farther on, and so firmly binding the trees one to another, that for entire leagues they are their sole supporters. The wood is so little varied in certain portions that one tree seems a repetition of all the others. Then, to a height of five and often six feet, rises a thick and serried grass.

Unexpectedly, beneath the tread of the imprudent traveler, immense pitfalls open, or there are marshes, and morasses covered with a crust an inch thick, which engulf the bold person who sets foot upon them in their foetid mud ; farther on, a river runs unknown and silently, forming rapids and making its way with difficulty through the heaps of mould and dead wood which it deposits on its banks.

Our reader will see, after the abridged description we have made, that it is not so hard as they may have believed, to pass from tree to tree for long distances.

Moreover, to completely edify the reader, we will tell him what he was probably ignorant of: that is that in certain regions of the prairies, this manner of journeying is put into practice not as may be supposed, to escape an enemy's pursuit, but simply to proceed more speedily, not to be obliged to cut a path with the hatchet and risk rolling down some precipice, so much the more as the most part of the trees are gigantic and their enormous branches are interwoven with vines which form, so to say, a platform or floor, some twenty-five feet above the ground.

Sutter's proposition, therefore, had in it nothing extraordinary, made to men who had in all probability already employed

this system of locomotion. Sutter made his last preparations: they were not long, being simply to as much as possible destroy all traces of their encampment.

To mislead those who perchance might be led to the place, Sutter and his band followed for nearly an hour the road taken by Nathan, then he returned walking backwards as well as his followers, effacing their traces as they proceeded but doing it in such a manner that an attentive eye would discover it without probably suspecting that they had left them so expressly.

After two hours of this fatiguing march during which the bandits had not exchanged one word, they came upon a flat granite rock which was the best place for them to repose without fear of leaving traces of their passage, for the rock was too hard to preserve prints of their footsteps.

‘Ouf!’ muttered Pepito Rosario, ‘I am not sorry to breathe again!’

‘You are already fatigued, then, Senor Pepito,’ said Sutter. ‘well, you are wearied too soon; wait, what we have hitherto done is nothing to what we shall see.’

‘I doubt if the road we are about to pursue, or any other, can present so many difficulties as the one we have got over—diablos! if it does, it will make one renounce it!’

‘Nay, if you prefer to make a present of your scalp to the Comanches, it is the most easy thing in the world, you have only to stay where you are, you may be certain that they will not be tardy in finding you: you know the redskins are like wolves, fresh flesh attracts them, they scent it from afar.’

‘Canarios! I would rather be roasted at a slow fire than fall into the hands of those accursed pagans.’

‘Come, come!’ said Sutter interrupting him, ‘all such speaking is saying nothing: what is written, is written; no one can escape his destiny. To occupy ourselves about what may come to pass is a folly.’

‘Well said, Sutter! you have spoken, caspita! like a most sensible man, and I am completely of your way of thinking; come, what have you to say?’

‘I believe that, thanks to the trick we have executed, we have so well covered our traces that the devil in person could not divine the direction we have taken. The first portion of our task is over: now, we must not betray ourselves by imprudence or too much precipitation. I have brought you here because, as you see, at the end of this stone, the virgin forest com-

mences. The greatest difficulty is to get up the first tree without leaving marks. Leave me to act in my own fashion and I engage you will have nothing to repent.'

'Very well, what shall we do?'

'You see that large branch which, nearly thirty feet above our heads, overhangs the platform we are standing on.'

'I do—well?'

'With my lasso I will catch the end of it; we will pull it then down to us, and keep it thus until you and the rest shall have reached the top branches: in that way, we will leave no tale-telling traces of our ascension.'

'Your idea is very ingenious, father,' said Richard Sutter, 'but I do not see how you are going to get over one thing.'

'What is that?'

'As long as some one stays here to keep down the branch, it is evident that it will be bent; but when Pepito, Simon, Dog's-face and I are above, and you are here below, how will you manage to follow us?'

His father burst into laughter.

'That need not torment you, son Dick; I thought you had been often enough along with me to know that I never do a thing without calculating its results.'

'So I have, father, but if I had not asked the question I knew Pepito would.'

Sutter took his lasso, *lava* it around his right hand and threw it, after having twice or thrice whirled it around his head. The throw was so well aimed that the running knot encircled the end of the branch.

'Now,' cried the bandit, 'a pull or two!'

The others ran to him; under their efforts the lasso tightened, the bough yielded little by little and, at the end of a few minutes, was bent so far downward that it could be grasped by the hand, as old Sutter had foreseen.

'Up with you, Dick, now! quick!' cried he to his son

The latter required no repetition of the order; he clambered up on the branch, ran resolutely along it, steadyng himself to the right and left by the twigs; in the twinkling of an eye he was by the trunk: then, and, on his father's command, he grasped the upper boughs among which he disappeared.

'Now you, Simon and Pepito,' said the bandit leader

The Spaniard sprang up, rapidly crossed the bough and, like Richard Sutter, disappeared in the foliage, actions which were imitated by Simon Munez and Dog'sface.

Remaining alone, thanks to his herculean strength, Sutter maintained the limb from springing upward by holding it with his arms, hanging all his weight upon it and clinging with his feet to a rock. All at once the tree trembled to its roots—the limb rose with a shrill whistle and a swiftness enough to make one giddy.

The bandits involuntarily closed their eyes ; when they opened them again, they perceived their leader astride of the still-trembling bough, quietly unloosening the slipnoose of his lasso. Then with perfect tranquility, the old bandit rose and winding his lasso around his waist, joined his men.

'Well,' said he, 'you see, it is done ; now, we must continue our way—are you ready ?'

'Let us be off forthwith,' responded the bandits.

We repeat—aside from its strangeness, this manner of travelling has nothing dangerous, difficult or even incommodious. Thanks to the immense screens of creepers which were twisted capriciously about them and to the branches woven intricately to each other, they could pass without being perceived from limb to limb, over the ground some seventy or eighty feet. Above and around them, they would betimes perceive wild beasts whom they aroused in their mysterious retreats and who, with extended necks and glowing eyes, looked at them passing with an astonished air, unable to understand what they saw.

They went on in this way all the day, stopping from time to time to take breath and immediately resuming their way.

They had crossed, continually over their swaying bridge, a rather large river and were before long in the low country.

It was nearly five o'clock of the afternoon ; the sun's fading rays gleamed faintly on the moss-covered trunks of trees : the brown and grey owls, attracted by the myriads of flying insects which constitute their food, wheeled already in the air ; a thick mist, exhaled from the ground and formed a shroud in which the five bandits disappeared ; everything, in short, announced that night would not be slow to appear.

Sutter had taken the lead of his little band, so that in the almost inextricable maze of the forest, his companions, less accomplished than himself in woodcraft, made no mis-steps ; for, in the place where they were, all roadmarks disappeared to permit only a view of an immense interwoven mass of leafy twigs and creeping lianas.

'Well, comadre,' demanded Pepito Rosario, who, little ac-

customed to long pedestrian courses, weakened by the privations he had endured, and moreover as lazy as a Mexican, had for some time preceding progressed with extreme difficulty 'well, compadre, shall we not stop soon? I warn you that I cannot go much farther.'

The American turned quickly, and placing his large hand on the Spaniard's mouth, said in a low concentrated tone:

'Silence, silence! if you care for your scalp.'

'Cristo! if I care for my scalp?' muttered the other with a start of fright, 'why, what's the matter now?'

Sutter cautiously pulled aside a leafy branch, and making his companion a sign to imitate him, said:

'Look!'

After a moment's glimpse, the Spaniard started backward, his forehead pale and his face expressive of terror in every feature.

'Oh! cried he, 'we are this time lost!'

He staggered and would have fallen if the American had not grasped him firmly by the arm.

'What can we do?'

'Wait!' said old Sutter, coolly, 'our position is not yet hopeless. Though we can see them, they cannot see us.'

Pepito Rosario shook his head.

'You have led us to our doom,' said he, reproachfully.

'You are a dolt,' replied Sutter, disdainfully. 'Have I not risked myself with you? Would I not have sought to escape if there were danger? Leave me to myself, I tell you.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GRIZZLY BEAR.

THE NEW WORLD stands before the Old with respect to ferocious animals of all sorts and species.

The tribe of plantigrades has taken, especially in America, an enormous development, and possesses a ferocity before which pales all the beasts of the European Continent.

We speak here of that animal of prodigious strength, blind courage, and boundless cruelty, which the learned style *ursus cinereus*, the Americans the grizzly bear, and the French the *ours féroce*, or more commonly the *ours gris*.

The majority of travellers draw of this animal a really frightful portrait ; saying among other things that in it is joined to the stupidity of the white bear, the ferocity and courage of the great carnivorous animals. Having been somewhat of a traveller myself, I am here forced humbly to state that readers should believe with a certain restriction and much caution what is said in the tales of those gentlemen who, often placed in perilous positions, which disturb their natural dispositions of mind and body, have seen unclearly, and, in spite of themselves, ceding to the influence of the moment, have given way to exaggerations which have by degrees become articles of faith, and are now accepted as laws. I have not the intention of praising up the grizzly bear to the minds of my readers ; I only desire them to be no more unjust to it than towards the other animals formed by the hands of the Creator.

Therefore, setting aside all exaggeration and limiting ourselves to the strict truth, we will say a few words on the grizzly bear and its manners.

During our long sojourn in America, we have been near and seen enough of these animals to deem ourselves competent to speak of them.

Any one can see from the likeness—if not flattered, take an exact one—of this animal, that he is already ugly enough by nature, morally as well as physically, without one having need to make him still more so and transform into horror.

The grizzly bear, when he has reached his full growth, is ten feet long. His skin is woolly, very thick, of a grayish color, save near the ears, where he is brown. This animal's physiognomy is terrible ; it is the most ferocious of all the carnivora of America. Notwithstanding his heavy, unwieldy-looking form, his agility is extreme. He is so much the more to be feared as his indomitable courage owes its source to a consciousness of his prodigious force, and is near allied to fury.

The grizzly bear will attack all animals, but principally the large ruminants, such as bisons, etc. That which probably has given grounds to the exaggerated stories, is that the grizzly bear is not affected by cold, and in winter, famished in the immense forests covered by several feet of snow, descends towards the plains where he knows he will find game.

The Indians wage against him an endless war, in order to gain his long talons, of which they fabricate collars of great price.

Whatever he is, it was one of these formidable animals which Brandard and his two friends came suddenly upon.

The hunters soon made up their minds as to the course to be taken.

'We must kill him, or be killed,' said the old hunter laconically, 'the grizzly bear never recedes.'

'What shall we do?' asked Harry Clarkson.

'This is the first thing,' resumed his uncle. 'It is clear that this fellow has eaten enough, or he would not be regaining his den. You know, Harry, that bears seldom leave their retreats; if we have that luck to meet with a bear who has well dined we will have an immense advantage.'

'How so?'

'It is very simple,' said Brandard laughing, 'like men whose mealtimes are not regular, when bears set at table they stay there until they have filled themselves in their gluttony, which renders them dull, sleepy and, in a word, deprives them of half their faculties.'

'Humph!' observed the young American, 'what remains of them seems to me satisfying.'

'And to me also; but, hist! we must do something.'

'You see,' said Harry, 'that he is making ready to attack us.'

'That's just it,' responded Brandard.

Curumilla, as usual passionless, had cut a torch of candle-wood, and had concealed himself in some bushes a few paces from the bear.

The latter, after a moment of hesitation, during which he had cast around him a flashing look, as if he wished to count up the number of enemies he had to fight, had uttered a growl and licked his lips with a tongue as red as blood.

'You'll not make a feast on us, my lad,' said Brandard.

The bear appeared sensible of this bravado, he made an effort, and soon his monstrous head appeared completely uncovered a little above the level of the platform.

'Did I not tell you he had dined too heavily?' said Brandard. 'That's the reason he feels such a dislike to put himself in motion. Come, lazybones,' added he to the terrible animal, 'move a little!'

'Take care!' cried Clarkson. 'He is about to leap.'

In fact, the bear, by an abrupt movement like lightning, had, with one gigantic bound, scaled the barrier and stopped within barely twenty paces of the intrepid hunter. Brandard made

not a gesture, not a muscle of him moved ; his teeth however clenched as though they would break and a white foam appeared at either corner of his lips.

The bear (who, as we have said, was scarce twenty paces from the old hunter who seemed to brave him) surprised by the old American's boldness, subdued by the electric fluid which incessantly escaped from the hunter's eye, made a step backward.

For an instant he stood motionless with lowered head ; but soon he began to throw up the earth with his long claws, growling low as if he wished to be encouraged to commence the attack.

Suddenly he gathered himself ; Curumilla took advantage of the instant, he lit the piece of torchwood he had held ready and, on a sign from Brandard, waved the flame before the bear.

The latter, dazzled by the brilliant light of the torch which had so unexpectedly dissipated the surrounding obscurity, rose suddenly on his hind paws and, turning towards the Indian, tried with his forepaws to reach the torch, which he probably thought to extinguish.

Brandard cocked his rifle, fixed himself firmly on his feet, took aim and whistled gently.

When the sound of whistling reached his ears, the bear stopped ; he staid thus listening for several seconds as if seeking to understand this unusual sound.

The old hunter still kept whistling, while Harry with his cocked rifle, looked on, ready to come to the aid of his uncle or the Indian in case they should be in danger.

The bear turned slowly towards Brandard.

Curumilla, torch in hand, followed attentively the animal's every movement.

The bear at last faced the hunter ; Brandard felt his warm and foetid breath which came from his oppressed breast with hollow growls. The man and the beast eyed each other ; the bloodshot eye of the bear was as if riveted on the American's clear one, who watched him steadily, still continuing to whistle.

There was a minute, a century of mighty anxiety.

The bear, as if to escape the strange fascination which had seized upon him, shook his head twice and rushed forward with a terrible yell.

At the same instant a shot was fired.

Harry Clarkson ran up to his uncle, who was reloading his

gun, while but two yards from him the dying animal was uttering cries of rage and tearing up the rocky ground in the last throes of his agony.

Curumilla, bent forward, was curiously viewing the writhings of the monster at his feet.

‘Thanks to God !’ cried Harry, ‘you are safe, uncle !’

‘This is not the first time you have seen me in danger, my boy,’ said the old hunter, ‘you are much affected, nephew, though you have seen Curumilla and I tumble over many of these fellows—ask the Indian how many.’

‘Yes, but I can never shake off the feeling, less than ever at this moment, when the thought of my brother’s death hangs still upon me,’ said the young man; ‘you, uncle, are my only friend in the world, save Curumilla, and I dread that I am to end my life alone.’

‘Come, come, Harry,’ said his uncle dashing away a tear, ‘we are all in God’s hands; don’t give up to gloomy feelings; we are in the world and must make the best of it.’

The young man smiled sadly and went up to the bear’s body, which Curumilla was skinning of its magnificent fur which covered a square full ten feet.

Brandard’s bullet had entered its right eye.

‘A fine shot, uncle; in the eye.’

‘Here, Harry, while Curumilla prepares our breakfast, I will go to make an examination down the ravine. Help the Indian to roast my friend yonder, and I am sure that, after a taste of his steaks, you will give way to none but happy thoughts.’

And carefully shouldering his rifle, Brandard disappeared among the bushes.

The bear weighed at least four hundred pounds. After having skinned him with that dexterity possessed by the Indians, Curumilla, with Harry’s aid, had hung the body to a tree whose branch bent under the weight; he had cut steaks and drawn out the pluck which hunters think the most delicate part of the beast; then, while Clarkson lit the fire and laid the steaks on the coals, the Indian entered the bear’s den.

Harry Clarkson, long accustomed to the savage’s mode of acting, made no observation and continued his preparations for breakfast, so much the more as the fatigue of the night and the long hardship he had undergone gave him an appetite which the fumes of the broiling steaks could not but increase.

However, the breakfast was ready long before Brandard made his appearance. Harry Clarkson commenced to grow

uneasy on his account, as well as on Curumilla's, who had not come of the cave into which he had been for more than an hour.

The young man rose and was about to make some signal, when at the same moment both Brandard and the Indian appeared.

Curumilla held in his hand two cubskins.

'What's that?' Harry could not help inquiring.
he Indian smiled.

The bear was a female,' said he.

Shall we breakfast now?' said Brandard.

'Immediately,' said his nephew, 'I was watching for you and the chief.'

'Have I been long gone?'

'More than an hour.'

'It was not my fault. It was as black down there in the gully as an oven. I had great pains to find Edward's body; but, heaven be thanked, he is underground now, and out of the reach of coyotes and other vermin of the prairies.'

Harry Clarkson took his hand and wrung it tenderly, while two tears of thankfulness rolled down his cheeks.

'Uncle,' said he in a moved voice, 'you are better than us all; you think of everything. Thanks, uncle, thanks for having buried my dear brother's body; you make me nearly happy at this moment.'

'Well, well,' said the hunter, turning aside his head, so as not to show the emotion, which, despite himself he felt; 'eat, will you! I am very hungry, the sun is up, and we are not yet out of this cursed labyrinth where we have nearly left our bones.'

The three men sat around the fire and commenced an attack on the repast awaiting them.

When they had finished eating, which was not long, thanks to Brandard who excited them every moment to eat double mouthfuls, they rose and prepared to go.

'Pay attention to your steps,' said the old woodsman, 'watch carefully around you, Harry, for I am much in the wrong if before an hour, we do not come upon the trail of bandits.'

'What makes you suppose so?'

'Nothing, I have no grounds,' said the American smiling; 'but there is a forerunner which tells me that those whom we seek will not evade us long.'

'God hear you, uncle!' exclaimed the young man.

‘Take up the march, then !’ said Brandard setting off.

The young man and Curumilla followed him.

At this moment the sun appeared above the horizon, the forest awoke as by enchantment, and the birds warbled forth from their swelling throats a gush of melody, the matinal hymn with which each morn they salute the God of Day.

CHAPTER XIV.

NATHAN AGAIN.

As we have before mentioned, William Delarue, the Canadian voyageur and trapper, had been severely wounded during the fray between Sutter’s escaping band and the men who had taken upon themselves the duty of avenging the attack on the little settlement of the Canadian River. He had been brought by the Unicorn’s warriors with them on their return, for he would only have delayed Brandard’s projects of vengeance, and had been installed in the Comanche’s winter village in the most commodious calli, where the utmost care had been taken of him.

Weeks passed and it was long before Delarue could stand, ride, or move with his former ease.

One morning a laughing sun was brightening up the village, the sky was blue and the air cheering, Delarue, who had returned from a hunting expedition with some warriors, was by the door of his dwelling carelessly watching the little Indian children who were playing not far off, by the river side. Near him was Sunbeam who had rendered him many little attentions during his convalescence, for she had not forgot that Delarue was a friend of her *friends*, as she called those who had saved her from death.

‘Does my brother feel well ?’ inquired she in her voice gentle and musical as the Mexican nightingale.

‘I am entirely well and am eager to once more go on the warpath,’ replied the trapper.

‘I am glad to hear it,’ said Sunbeam, with a charming smile; ‘because I have good news for my brother.’

‘Good news !’ ejaculated the Canadian; ‘have my friends sent for me ?’

‘No, but one of the great warriors of the tribe has just

tered the village,' continued the young Indian woman 'the Spider left the chief but two days ago.'

'Where is the chief? are my friends with him?'

'The Spider says the chief is still in the mountains with his warriors; your friends are yet in the pursuit of their enemies, whom they are sure of overtaking.'

'I must join them, then; I will start on the moment.'

'My brother is like powder, he is too quick!' said Sunbeam 'He can go with the Spider whom the Unicorn charged to select twenty warriors and take them to him.'

'How long before then?'

'Three days, at least: the Spider must have a council of the chiefs; many of our young men are dispersed in the forest hunting and tending their traps; he cannot go until the third day.'

With these words, Sunbeam darted away like an antelope, leaving the Canadian smoking his pipe.

Things happened as Sunbeam had foreseen.

An hour afterwards, the hachesto convoked the head chiefs in the medicine lodge. The council was a long one: it was prolonged all day. The Spider's demand was granted and twenty famed warriors were chosen to go under his orders to join the grand chief of the tribe. Two days were then taken up to bring together the absent warriors.

On the third day, the warriors, at the head of whom rode the Spider and William Delarue, started off at a trot, at which pace they continued all day. At sunset, the Spider gave the order to encamp.

Fires were kindled, supper prepared and after the meal all save the sentinels, gave themselves up to sleep. At sunrise, they started again; as they approached the mountains, the wind became cold, and a thick fog lay on the prairie. Every one carefully wrapped themselves up in their furs until ten o'clock in the morning, by which time, the solar rays, having acquired some power, rendered this precaution useless. In certain countries of North America, the climate offers this scarcely agreeable peculiarity: the morning is freezing cold, at midday the heat is stifling, and at evening the thermometer descends again below zero.

The day passed without incident worthy of being recorded. Towards evening, an hour before the night halt, the Spider, who galloped as scout some yards in advance of his troop, discovered footsteps. These marks were clear, steady, deep,

appeared to be those of a young vigorous man, habituated to walking.

The Spider joined his men without communicating to any one the discovery he had made or the result of his observations.

William Delarue, near whom he came, touched his shoulder to attract his attention.

'Look, warrior,' said he pointing to the left of them; 'is not that a man walking before us?'

The Indian stopped, placed his hand over his eyes like a visor to concentrate the visual organs and took a long examination of the point the Canadian had designated. Finally he started his horse, without a word.

'What thinks my brother?' asked Delarue.

'It is a man,' replied the Indian: 'from here he appears to be an Indian, and yet, either I have seen badly or I am deceiving myself.'

'How's that?'

'I will tell you: there is something odd about him; a few instants since, I discovered footsteps. From their direction, they are those of that man yonder, and are as fresh as if made this moment.'

'Well?'

'Well, those footprints were not a red man's, but are a white man's.'

'Are you sure of what you say?' inquired the voyageur becoming serious; 'it is indeed strange.'

The Indian smiled.

'The Spider is a warrior,' said he; 'a child of eight years would have seen like me: the feet were turned out; the Indians turn theirs in; the toes are near each other, while ours are parted; after such indications, is it possible to be wrong, I ask my brother?'

'It is true,' said the Canadian, 'I was hasty.'

'And, hold,' resumed the other, 'now that we are nearer that man, mark his gait: it is clear that he tries to hide himself, he thinks we have not seen him and act consequently. There he goes out of sight behind that mastic-tree—now he appears again. See, he stops to reflect, dreads that we have perceived him and that this walk seems suspicious to us. Stay, he sits down to await us.'

'Be on our guard,' said Delarue.

'I will watch,' responded the Spider with a sinister smile.

All that the Spider had seen was really done. The stranger

after having made many attempts to hide behind shrubs and bushes, had calculated that if he took to flight, those who saw him would soon run him down, thanks to their horses. Making up his mind, therefore, to take things as they were, he had turned and, seated on the ground, his back against a tamarind, he was quietly smoking while waiting for the horsemen who rapidly neared him.

The closer the Comanches approached this man, the more it seemed to them that he was an Indian.

They found themselves soon within a few steps of him, when all their doubts ceased. This man was, or appeared to be at least, one of those innumerable sorcerers who run from tribe to tribe in the Far West to heal the wounded, cure the sick and practise their enchantments.

In fact, the wizard was no one else than Nathan Sutter, whom the reader has no doubt recognized long since.

After having murdered the poor sorcerer whom his science should have put on his guard against such abominable treachery, Nathan had went resolutely forward, resolved to cross through the enemy's lines, almost certain to succeed, thanks to disguise which, we repeat, was worn with great perfection.

When he had perceived the Comanches, putting to the test the old proverb which says: 'when one has anything to suspect, he should make his legs save his neck,' he had sortht to flee; unfortunately for him, he was afoot and in an open country denuded of trees, which he saw soon would be his loss, as his flight would give suspicions to men who, not knowing him, might pass him by without troubling him. He also depended on the superstitious character of Indians and on the remarkable quantity of audacity and effrontery wherewith he was endowed, to deceive them.

These reflections were made by Nathan with that quickness which distinguishes men of action; his part was taken in an instant, and seating himself at the foot of a tree, he awaited the strangers impassively.

Besides, Nathan was a man of adventurous temerity and indomitable character: the sudden position into which chance threw him, far from making him fear, pleased him on the contrary and caused in him a certain emotion which is not bereft of charms for a man of his stamp.

Following that system which consists of taking every advantage which shows itself, he established himself in his assumed rank and when the Indians stopped before him addressed them the first thus :

‘ My sons are welcome to my camp,’ said he in that guttural accent of the red race which the whites have such pains to succeed in imitating ; ‘ the Wacondah has led them here, and I am forced to fulfil his intentions by receiving them as well as I can.’

‘ Thanks,’ said the Spider flinging on him an investigating glance, ‘ we accept our brother’s offer as frankly as he made it ; my young men will camp here.’

He gave orders which were forthwith executed.

After supper, the Spider lit his Indian pipe and seated himself by the sorcerer ; he wished to converse with him to clear up, not the suspicions, but the doubts he had of him.

Delarue had scrutinized the sorcerer, and had retired, showing no outward symptoms of suspicions, though inwardly he was asking himself where he could have before met the man.

Nathan had caught several glimpses of the white man whom he instantly recognized as the man whom his father had wounded and had not breathed freely until Delarue had retired evincing no tokens of having penetrated his disguise. While smoking with all the gravity which red men display in this operation, enshrouding himself in a thick cloud of smoke which he emitted from his mouth and nose, he had followed with a side glance the Spider’s movements, without appearing to notice him.

‘ My father travels ?’ asked the Spider.

‘ Yes,’ replied the counterfeit wizard laconically

‘ For how long ?’

‘ Since eight moons.’

‘ Ooah !’ said the Indian in astonishment ; ‘ from whence comes my father ?’

Nathan took his pipe from his mouth, took on his features a mysterious air and replied in a grave and reserved tone :

‘ The Wacondah is all-powerful, those to whom He speaks keep His words in their ears.’

‘ Right,’ returned the Spider bowing, though he could not understand.

‘ Is my son a warrior of the Queen of the Prairies, that is a Comanche ?’ resumed the pretended wizard.

‘ I am, indeed, a Comanche warrior.’

‘ Is my son on the hunting path ?’

‘ No, I am at this moment on the war-path.’

‘ Ooah ! my son hopes to deceive a great medecine, when he pronounces such words before me.’

'My words are true, my blood runs clear as water in my veins, a lie never sullied my lips, my heart never whispered to my mouth other than the truth,' returned the Spider haughtily for he was wounded by the sorcerer's suspicious.

'Good, I believe,' resumed the latter; 'but since when do the Comanches take white men on the war-path?'

'Comanches are masters of their actions, no one has the right to control them.'

1 Nathan saw that he was on the wrong road and that if the conversation continued on that ground, he would alienate this man whom he so much wished to make a friend. He changed tactics.

'Less than all others,' began he, 'do I recognize the right of controlling the actions of warriors—am I not a man of peace?'

The Spider smiled scornfully.

'In truth,' said he, in a more good-humored tone, 'great medicines like my father are like women, they have long lives; the Wacondah protects them.'

The pretended sorcerer took care not to show the bitterness in the sarcasm he levelled at the savage.

'Does my son return to his village?' demanded he.

'No,' rejoined the other, 'I go to join the great chief of my tribe, who, with his most celebrated warriors, is on an expedition.'

'To whose tribe does my son belong?'

'The Unicorn's.'

Nathan shuddered internally, although his visage was impassible.

'Ooah!' said he, 'the Unicorn is a great chief; his renown extends over the earth. What brave dare struggle with him on the prairie?'

'My father knows him?'

'I have not that honor, though I have often desired it; never to this day did I meet with that celebrated chief.'

'That may be; if my father desires it, I will make them acquainted.'

'That would be fortunate for me, but the mission which the Wacondah has confined in me claims my presence far from here. Time presses; I must, in spite of my wish, go on my way.'

'Good! the Unicorn is but three hours' march from this spot; early to-morrow we can reach his camp.'

'How is it, then, that my brother, being so near the chief has stopped here?'

All suspicion was effaced from the Indian's mind, so he frankly replied this time without seeking to disguise all the truth :

' My father is right: I was not told to hasten, and meeting my father on the roadside, accepted his invitation to please him.'

' My son is young,' responded Nathan, with an insinuating smile.

' I am, but there are few older braves who have gained more of the esteem of their tribe than the Spider,' said the red man proudly.

' I do not doubt it,' said Nathan, in a conciliatory tone, ' may the Wacondah protect him, and grant him a long life to destroy the enemies of the Comanches, and be exalted by his tribe.'

' Thanks, but will not my father accompany me to the Unicorn's camp where he will be most kindly treated ?'

Nathan saw that he would excite suspicion, if he held out any longer against the warrior's pressings, so he determined to accept. The American hesitated no longer, but trusted to his good star to draw him from the predicament in which he was placed. Chance is especially the bandit's god ; it is on him they depend, and we are forced to confess that he rarely deceives them.

' I will accompany my son to the Unicorn's camp,' said he.

The conversation continued some time between the two men.

At last, when the night was fully come, the Spider took leave of the sorcerer, and retired for the night. Remaining alone before the fire, Nathan flung an investigating glance. The sentinels, motionless as bronze statues, were watching, leaning on their long lances.

All flight was impossible.

The American sighed regretfully, drew his buffalo robe around him, and extended himself on the ground, muttering in a low voice :

' Bah, to-morrow comes day. Since I have succeeded in deceiving this Indian, and puzzling the white man, why may I not be as lucky with others ?'

And he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DISCOVERY.

THE NIGHT passed tranquilly. When the sun appeared in the horizon, all was commotion in the encampment. The horses were saddled, ranks formed, and the Indians were only awaiting the order to march.

Nathan then conformed with his part of wizard, took a calabash, filled it with water, and dipping in it a branch, sprinkled water to the four cardinal points, muttering mystical words to drive away the spirit of evil; he at last threw the contents of the calabash towards the sun, crying thrice in a loud voice:

‘Sun, receive this offering: look upon us with a favorable eye, we are thy children.’

When this ceremony was terminated, the Indian band took up the march.

The sorcerer's incantation had pleased them, the more so as at the moment of their departure, four bald-headed eagles, unfolding their large wings, had risen slowly on their right, mounting in a straight line to the sky, where soon they were lost to sight at a prodigious altitude.

These presages were very favorable, and they regarded the sorcerer admiringly, for he had suddenly acquired great importance in the eyes of the superstitious Comanches.

Two persons, however, preserved against him a feeling of dislike which they could not overcome.

These two persons were the Spider, to whom William Delarue had confided his suspicions, and the Canadian.

In spite of himself, the latter kept puzzling his brain and every instant glancing at the sorcerer who, from a species of intuition, was warned of the examination he was subjected to, and who, therefore, kept him at a respectful distance, riding by the side of the Spider whom he kept in conversation, that he might not seek the white trapper and by linking their doubts, form some trap against him.

The troop advanced at a trot through a country of grand and stirring scenery; here and there, dispersed without order in the plain, they perceived blocks of rock of a spherical form whose sides varied from two to four or even five hundred feet in height.

To the eastward rose the last peaks of the Sierra de los Comanches, in the midst of which the travellers became entangled.

The bare peaks showed against the sky their white snowy summits, which extended to the north until they faded away into a blueish mist which the Indians well recognized for a continuation of the Rocky Mountains.

To the left of the troop and almost at their feet spread forth an immense extent of desert bordered afar off by another line of almost imperceptible vapor which marked the place of the Rocky Mountains.

The Indians ascended by almost unknown pathways, but which their horses advanced up with resolution and as easily, as if they had had the surest of foothold.

As they entered among the mountains, the cold became more piercing: at length, at about nine o'clock of the morning, after having traversed a narrow gorge deeply sunken between two high mountains whose masses intercepted the sun's rays, they came into a pretty vale of a league in extent, in the centre of which rose the tents of the Unicorn's camp.

When the videttes had signalized the arrival of the Spider's detachment, some sixty warriors sprang to their horse's backs and came, shooting off guns and yelling welcome, before the new-comers who made their horses leap and replied by cries and the shrill, prolonged notes of their warwhistles. They thus made their entry into the Unicorn's camp and went towards the chief's hut.

The latter, notified of the arrival of the reinforcement he had expected, was standing with folded arms before his calli, between the totem and grand calumet.

The Unicorn had with one rapid look inspected the warriors and perceived Delarue and the strange Indian they were bringing with them; nevertheless, he seemed not to see them; his face displayed no symptom of emotion; he waited, impassibly, till the Spider would render an account of his mission.

The Comanche warrior dismounted, threw his horse's bridle to one of his companions, crossed his arms over his chest, bowed profoundly making each time a step forward and, when arrived a short distance from the sachem, saluted him a last time saying:

‘The Spider has accomplished his mission, he has taken the gazelle's feet to return the sooner.’

‘The Spider is an experienced warrior in whom I have entire confidence. Has he brought me the number of young men I asked of the nation?’ inquired the Unicorn.

‘The sages were assembled round the council fire, they lent

the ear to the Spider's words ; the twenty young warrior's are full of courage and proud to follow along the warpath so renowned a chief as my father.'

The Unicorn smiled with pride at this compliment. A few words explained to the sachem why Delarue had came with the Spider and the Canadian was heartily welcomed.

One person only was still before the Unicorn : that was the pretended sorcerer.

The two men attentively examined each other.

'What lucky chance has brought my father into my camp ?'

'The Wacondah's messengers go where He bids them go without discussing His will,' replied Nathan dryly.

'Right,' said the sachem, 'what asks my father ?'

'A night's hospitality.'

'Hospitality is granted even to an enemy in the desert ; my father is then ignorant of the customs of the prairie, that he asks me ?' said the sachem darting on him a suspicious glance.

Nathan bit his lips.

'My father has ill understood the sense of my words,' said he.

'It little matters,' interrupted the Unicorn with authority, 'the great medicine may pass the night at the camp ; a guest is sacred for the Comanches, traitors alone, when they are unmasked, are punished as they deserve. My father can retire.'

Nathan shuddered inwardly at these words which seemed to indicate that the chief had also suspicions and that his incognito was not as well kept as he believed. However, he closed his fears in his heart, and continued to put his best face on the matter.

'Thanks,' said he bowing.

The Unicorn returned his salute and turned his back on him.

'Humph !' said Nathan aside, 'I think I was wrong to risk myself among these red devils ; that chief's basilick eyes seemed to read through my forehead. We must keep on our guard.'

While making these reflections, Nathan went away with slow steps and high head, enchanted apparently at the results of his interview with the Unicorn.

At the same moment a man came running at full speed down the valley ; he passed within a step of Nathan and exchanged a glance with him.

Nathan shuddered.

'If he recognizes me, I am lost,' said he.

This man was Harry Clarkson whose coming here we will ~~are~~ long explain. He went on towards the Unicorn's wigwam.

'I am in the wolves' den,' said Nathan, 'my presumption has ruined me. I read in that man's look that I am recognized. Let us try to escape while we may.'

Nathan was too resolute a man to despair uselessly ; he lost not an instant in vain lamentations ; with that lucidity of inspiration which danger gives to courageous men, he calculated in a second the chances of success remaining to him and prepared to sustain a struggle. He knew too well the horrible torture which menaced him not to defend himself to the last.

Without stopping, without changing his pace, he continued to walk in the direction he followed, returning as he passed the salutes the Indian warriors addressed him.

He arrived without being troubled to the extremity of the camp. He dared not turn his head to see what occurred behind him but his practised ear caught no suspicious sounds ; nothing apparently came to corroborate his apprehensions, the camp was still plunged into the same repose.

'I was too hasty,' muttered he, 'the young man did not recognize me, and now I think, how could he ? he saw me but once or twice, and then but for a moment ; my disguise is good. No, wrong again, curse my luck ! I am not in safety here.' He made a step to enter the forest. At this moment a heavy hand fell on his shoulder.

He stopped short and wheeled around.

The Spider was at his side.

'Where goes my father ?' inquired the warrior in a mocking tone which doubled the bandit's fears : 'he has no doubt lost his way.'

'How so ?' demanded Nathan who strove to regain his coolness.

'On the side my father goes they leave the camp

'Well ?'

'My father has asked hospitality of the sachem ?'

'Yes.'

'Then, why does he go ?'

'Who has told you I am going ?'

'But it seems to me that the direction you take leads into the forest.'

'I know that well enough, for I was going into the wood to pick some magical plants to compose a great medicine I wish to offer to the chief to make him invulnerable.'

'Ooah!' said the Indian winking his eyes, 'when you tell him that, I do not doubt that he will let you go where you like.'

'What? am I a prisoner?'

'Not at all, but the order was given that no one should leave the camp without authorisation, and as you have forgotten to obtain that permission, I am constrained, to my great regret, to execute it.'

'Very well! I remain, but I shall not forget the manner which the Comanches exercise hospitality.'

'My father does wrong to speak thus, the honor of the nation requires this affair to be terminated without delay. My father will follow me to the chief; I am certain that after a short explanation all misunderstanding will cease between us.'

Nathan scented some plot; the Spider while speaking to him, had playful catlike manners which were but little encouraging. The proposition which he made him was no wise to his taste; but as he was not the stronger, he resigned, though quite against his heart, to follow the Spider and return to the Unicorn's hut.

'Go on before!' said he to the Indian.

Nathan silently followed the Spider.

The Unicorn was seated before his hut, surrounded by the principal chiefs: on either side stood Delarue and Harry Clarkson, leaning on their rifles.

When the pretended sorcerer arrived, the Indians showed neither by gestures nor by the play of their features that they knew what he was.

The American cast an earnest look on the assembled persons.

'I am lost!' muttered he, 'they are too calm.'

Nevertheless he placed himself before them, folded his arms, and stood waiting.

Then Harry Clarkson raised his head, and fixing on him an implacable gaze, said in a tone which sent a quiver of terror thrilling through his veins:

'Nathan Sutter, the chiefs require you to accomplish one of those miracles which the sorcerers of their tribes alone have the secret of.'

All eyes were turned on the bandit with curiosity; his reply was awaited that they might judge whether he was a coward or a brave man. He understood it, and responded with a scornful smile:

'The Comanches are dogs and old women; the hunters of my nation will drive them before them with whips. Boasting

to be so cunning, I a white, have deceived them, and had it not been for my countrymen yonder, the devil ~~fly~~ away with me if I would have been discovered !

‘So you confess you are not an Indian sorcerer?’

‘I do, most certainly. This Indian skin weighs heavy on a white man’s shoulder; I tear it off to resume my own, which I never should have quitted.’

Harry Clarkson and Delarue turned towards the Unicorn.

‘The chief sees,’ said they.

‘I see,’ rejoined the sachem; ‘is my brother a warrior in his nation?’ added he of the bandit.

The latter laughed.

‘I am,’ responded he, boldly, ‘I am the son of John Sutter, a man who has slain more of your accursed race than there are suns to a year; my name is Nathan. Do with me as you will, dogs, but you’ll not tear from my lips a single groan, from my breast one sigh.’

At these haughty words, a murmur of satisfaction ran through the rows of chiefs.

‘Ah!’ said the Unicorn, in whose ear the white hunters had been speaking. ‘What has brought Sutter’s son in the Comanche camp?’

‘I say nothing, chief,’ frankly returned the young man. ‘I did not seek it, I only wished to get through your lines to escape.’

‘Nathau takes us for children that he would try to deceive us,’ said Clarkson, as a smile of incredulity curled his lips.

‘Believe or not, it is the same to me; I have answered the truth.’

‘You cannot persuade us that you wear that disguise for that purpose only.’

‘You are my enemy, and I care not whether you believe or not; it will not alter my fate.’

‘Are your father and friends in the neighborhood, brought by the same chance that led you hither?’

‘As for them, may the devil wring my neck if I know where they are at this moment.’

‘I expected that answer from you; luckily, the Unicorn has warriors scattered in all directions, and they will soon be found.’

‘I don’t believe it.’

‘I have no need to tell you the fate that awaits you, have I?’

‘Not at all; I know that quite well; the redskins will prob

ably amuse themselves by flaying me alive, roasting me at a slow fire, or some other little playfulness—much good will it do them !

‘ And if you were set at liberty, would you consent to reveal where your father and his band are ?

‘ No ! I am a bandit, knowing no law or faith, I grant it ; but I will never be a traitor or an informer. Bear that in mind, and if you are curious to view my death, which I know you desire, you will see no flinching from me.’

‘ Well ?’ asked the Unicorn of Clarkson.

‘ He will not speak,’ replied the latter. ‘ Although he now says no, and evinces great firmness, perhaps tortures will make him yield and consent to speak.’

‘ So,’ began the chief, ‘ my brother’s advice is——’

‘ To be without pity for him as he has been for others.’

‘ Good !’

The sachem pointed to the captiv

‘ Lead him away,’ said he, ‘ and make all ready for the torture.’

‘ Thanks !’ returned Nathan, ‘ at least I will not linger long, which is one consolation.’

‘ Think while you wait of the little settlement on the Canadian River, of the mothers, sisters, and fathers whose blood have inspired the avengers,’ said Clarkson.

Nathan made no answer, but was led away, whistling between his teeth. He was tied to a mastic-tree, and two warriors were posted as sentinels over him. He watched them quietly and muttered :

‘ The disguise was good ; it took the eyes of hate to see under it.’

CHAPTER XVI.

NATHAN’S ESCAPE.

SUTTER, from the treetop in which he was hidden, had perceived his son tied to a tree.

This sight had suddenly stopped him ; he was directly above the Comanche camp, a most perilous position, inasmuch as the least mis-step, by revealing his presence, would suffice to destroy him.

One after another, the bandits put aside the branches, and looked at Nathan, who was far from suspecting that so near him were those whom he had quitted the previous evening.

The shades of night little by little descended around and soon objects were confounded in the obscurity which was rendered still more thick by the lights of the camp fires lit at distances, which threw around an uncertain light.

The old bandit had never loved his son ; Nathan had always been quarrelsome and overbearing, never very obedient and at times they even came to blows. Nathan's life and death, in point of paternal love, mattered but little to him ; but in the situation wherein his evil star had placed him, he regretted his son as one regrets a good comrade, a resolute man, an excellent marksman, an individual, in short, on whom, in an action he could depend.

We have no need here to insist on Sutter's character, the reader knows it. A strange idea came to his brain ; and as usual, when once his mind was made up, nothing could check it and he would confront every peril to put that idea in execution.

Sutter resolved to deliver his son, not, we repeat from affection, but to have one good rifle the more, in the likely event of a combat taking place.

But it was not an easy thing to deliver Nathan. The young man was far from thinking that, at the moment he was expecting death, a few yards from him his father was preparing all for his flight. This ignorance might injure the success of the bold attempt the bandit leader was meditating. The latter, before understanding anything, called his companions to him and communicated his prospect to them.

Richard Sutter, bold and adventurous like his father, applauded the resolution ; he saw in the trial a good chance to baffle the redskins and rejoiced, not so much at the freeing his brother, as at the figure they would present when, the hour for the torture having arrived, they would come to bind their victim to the stake and would not find him.

Pepito Rosario and Munez had an opinion diametrically opposed to the two Sutters ? their position, they said, was critical enough without going farther still to render it yet more perilous to try to save a man whom they might not rescue, and, failing in the attempt, they could not escape giving the redskins an alarm and thus share Nathan's fate ; Dog's-face took no part in the discussion, evidently caring for neither one nor the other.

The discussion was long and animated between the four adventurers, each one holding firmly to his own opinion : it seemed if the disputants would never agree, but Sutter cut short all observation, by saying that he would save his son, if he was to do it alone, and had all the Indians of the West against him.

Before such a resolve, the Spaniard and the Mexican were forced to give way.

Their leader thereupon prepared to execute his plan.

We have said night had come on ; with it thick shades had, like a black shroud, enveloped the prairie, the moon, in its wane, would not appear till two o'clock in the morning ; it was now but eight in the evening, and Sutter had six hours of darkness before him which he resolved not to waste.

The night grew more and more dark, large black clouds charged with electricity surged heavily along and intercepted the starlight ; the night breeze had arisen at sunset and whistled lugubriously through the branches of the old monarchs of the virgin forest.

Excepting the sentinels around the camp, all the Indians were extended around the fires and, wrapped up in their buffalo robes, were slumbering.

Nathan was sleeping or seemed to sleep, bound to a tree ; two warriors, charged to watch him, seeing him so apparently resigned to his fate, had fallen asleep not far from him.

All at once a low hiss like that of the ribbon-snake came from the top of the tree at the foot of which lay the prisoner. The latter suddenly opened his eyes and flung about him a questioning look, without moving in the least from fear of alarming his guard.

A second hiss, longer than the first was heard, followed almost immediately by a third.

Nathan cautiously raised his head and looked upward, but the darkness was so opaque that he could distinguish nothing. At this moment some object, whose form he could not make out, touched his cheek and, shaken by an up-and-down movement, struck his face several times. This object by degrees descended and at last fell at the young man's feet. He lowered his head and examined it.

It was a knife !

Nathan could scarce restrain an exclamation of joy. He was not entirely beyond assistance ! Unknown friends were interested in his fate and were seeking means to save him.

Hope once again entered his heart and, like a boxer who for a moment had been stunned by a blow he had received, he called up all his forces to again commence the contest.

Bold though a man may be, no matter how resolved he is to bravely make the sacrifice of his life without thoughts of the past, yet when at the moment of his doom a ray of hope illuminates his astonished eyes, he immediately starts up, repulse the image of death from his mind, and fights fearfully to reconquer that existence he but a short time before threw away.

This was so in Nathan: he gazed for a moment on his guardians.

There is one little detail, perhaps a trivial one, but too true to be passed over in silence: at the moment when he had heard the first hiss, the young man had continued his regular breathing, although perfectly awake; now, he was more careful than ever not to check it, for it was a monotonous sound whose stopping might arouse the warriors on guard.

There was a great study for a painter in the aspect of that man who, with widely-opened eyes, frowning brows, features contracted by hope and dread, was painfully working at the thongs which encircled his arms and body. With unheard-of pains and mighty efforts Nathan managed first of all to release his left hand, then his right; with these free he cleared his body from the tree, stooped noiselessly for the knife, snatched it up, untied the cord by which it had been let down, and severed the bonds on his lower limbs.

The lasso by which the knife had descended was drawn up. Nathan had stuck the knife in his waist and retook his former position.

Suddenly one of his two guards turned towards him, stamped his feet to make his chilled blood circulate, and came to him, doubtless to examine the captive's bonds.

Nathan, with half-closed eyes, carefully spied the Indian's movements. When he saw the Comanche's face within his reach, as quick as thought he grasped him around the neck, and that so unexpectedly that the redskin, held by the throat, had not time to draw a breath.

Nathan, as we have mentioned, was endowed with Herculean strength; at this moment, hope of deliverance doubled it. He lifted the Indian from off the ground, while the latter strove vainly to shake off the deadly clutch: the bandit's iron fingers tightened more and more by a slow, calculated and irresistible pressure.

The warrior, with bloodshot eyes, purple features and gasping mouth through which lolled his tongue, beat the air mechanically with his hands, writhed in one last convulsion and remained rigid in the American's hands. He was dead.

Nathan held him two or three minutes more to be certain that all was over, and then laid the dead body close by him in a position which perfectly simulated sleep. Then he passed his hand over his forehead to wipe off the cold sweat which streamed from it, and cast his eyes upward to the tree-tops nothing appeared.

A frightful thought seized the young man: what if his friends, despairing of saving him, should have abandoned him? A horrible anguish pressed on his breast.

Still he had recognized his father's signal; the hiss of the ribbon-snake had long been agreed on between them to correspond in similar circumstances. His father was not a man to leave unachieved a work commenced by him, whatever would be the consequences. And still minutes passed on, one after another, and nothing came to relieve the young man's mind: all kept quiet and dark as ever.

Near half an hour passed thus.

Nathan was a prey to an impatient fever and a terror impossible to describe. Till this moment no one in the camp had, it is true, perceived the isolated movement he had made, but some unfortunate chance might at any moment reveal his projects of flight; it required but one Indian to be aroused by the cold and pass by him while on a walk to circulate his blood.

Since his friends forgot, the young man must help himself.

The first thing was to rid himself of the second sentinel; to achieve this, he extended himself flat on the ground, and still continuing to feign a deep sleep, he crept gently in the direction of the warrior. He approached him, inch by inch, so insensible was his progress. Finally he came within two paces of the sleeping Indian.

Nathan rose, drew back a step, gathered himself up, and bounded like a jaguar on the red man, on whose breast he placed his knee, while with his left hand he forcibly compressed his throat.

The Comanche, suddenly awoke, made an abrupt movement to shake off the fatal grasp and opened his bewildered eyes without being able to utter a cry.

Nathan, without a word, drew out the knife he had thrust

into his waistband and buried its whole blade in the Indian's heart, still keeping him down. The warrior fell back as if struck by lightning, and expired without a sound.

'Two!' muttered the bandit, wiping the knife. 'This is a fine weapon. Now, come what may, I shall not die without vengeance.'

Nathan, when he had seen his disguise useless, had asked to resume his own clothing, which he had been allowed to do. By a singular chance the Indian whom he had just stabbed had kept his gamebag and rifle, which the young man retook; he uttered a sigh of satisfaction on again being in possession of these objects so precious to him, and was now fully equipped as a woodsman. Time pressed, he must at any price evade the sentinels and quit the encampment.

What had he to fear? the being killed?

If he remained, he knew well the fate which awaited him; it was a thousand times better to be slain outright in making an attempt at escape than to wait for the torture. He flung a ferocious look around him, bent himself forward, pricked his ears and cocked his rifle silently.

The most profound calm reigned in the camp.

'Come,' muttered the young man, 'this is no moment to hesitate; we must be gone.'

At this same moment the hiss of the ribbon-snake sounded again.

Nathan started.

'Oh, ho!' said he, 'it appears they have not gone off without me, as I believed.'

Then he bent down to the ground and crawled back to the tree to which he had been tied. A lasso was swinging to and fro: this lasso ended in one of those double knots which seamen style chairs, half of which passes under the thighs while the other holds up the chest.

'By heaven!' muttered Nathan joyously, 'it takes the old man to have such ideas. What a game we are playing the red-skins! They will surely think me a sorcerer—I defy them to find my traces.'

While making this monologue to himself, the bandit had fixed himself in the chair.

The lasso, pulled by vigorous hands, rapidly ascended, and Nathan ere long disappeared in the midst of the thick foliage of the mastic-tree. When he reached the first boughs, the young man shook off the lasso and, clambering up with hands and feet, in a few instants joined his old companions.

'Oh,' muttered he drawing two or three long breaths and wiping away the sweat of which flowed from his face, 'I can now say I have escaped finely. Thanks to you, for I would have been lost without you, may the devil burn me, else !'

'Enough!' said his father curtly; 'we have no time to lose.'

'Well, then, which way are you going?'

'This way,' said Sutter extending his hand in the direction of the camp.

'The deuce!' cried Nathan quickly, 'are you mad, or have you only saved my life that we may altogether fall into the enemy's hands?'

'What do you mean?'

'One thing that you would see as well as me if it was daylight: the forest terminates abruptly a few yards from here, at the edge of an immense quebrada.'

'So!' exclaimed Sutter; 'what must we do, then?'

'Retrace your way for about half a league and then turn to the left. I have seen enough of the country since I left you to dimly remember the lay of the land, but, as I tell you, we must get away from here instantly.'

'And the more so as the moon will soon be up,' observed Richard Sutter; 'and if unluckily the redskins perceive Nat's flight, they will be speedily on our trail.'

'Well said, Dick,' returned Nathan; 'off we go.'

Sutter put himself at the head of the little party, which commenced their retrograde march. This was extremely difficult on so obscure a night: every step took time, for they first pressed slightly to see that the foothold was solid, or otherwise they would risk falling from limb to limb and break their necks on the ground some seventy or eighty feet below. They had hardly proceeded three hundred paces before a deafening clamor arose behind them: a great light illumined the forest and through the leaves the fugitives perceived the black forms of the savages who were running in every direction, with torches which they brandished in fury.

'So,' said Sutter. 'it seems that the Comanches have found out you have left them.'

'No doubt,' returned Nathan laughing. 'Poor fellows, they will never be consoled for my loss.'

'So much the more as you did not leave them without leaving traces of your passage.'

'Just as you say, father,' said the other lifting the flap of his hunting frock and showing two bloody scalps which were suspended at his belt: 'I could not help raising their hair.'

Before escaping, Nathan had scalped his two guards.

‘No wonder, then, that they are furious,’ said Rosario ; ‘you know the Comanches never pardon. How could you have committed such imprudence ?’

‘Look you, Senor Pepito,’ said Nathan Sutter brutally, ‘don’t meddle with what don’t concern you, but leave me to my own fashion, if you do not want the butt-end of my rifle to come in contact with your head, and send you to take my place.’

The Spaniard bit his lips and drew a dagger.

‘Caspita ! cursed American !’ muttered he.

‘Come on, then, greaser, if you will have it,’ returned Nathan unsheathing the knife which had already done him so much service.

‘Come, let us have peace, in the devil’s name !’ said Sutter ; ‘you will bring the Indians down upon us with your useless brawls.’

‘Yes,’ added Richard ; ‘when we are in safety, you can settle your dispute with your knives like *caballeros* (gentlemen). But, now, we have something else to do than quarrel like two old women.’

The two men exchanged a look charged with hate, but kept silent.

The troop, guided by Sutter, continued their way, pursued by the shouts and yells of the infuriated savages who seemed to come nearer.

‘Can they have discovered our trail ?’ muttered Sutter shaking his head.

CHAPTER XVII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

WE will now return to Brandard and his companions, whom we left resuming their pursuit of the bandits.

The old hunter had by this time became, body and soul, absorbed in this prolonged man-hunt ; it was the first time, since he had dwelt on the prairie, that he had been matched against so skilled a woodsman as Sutter.

Like the old American, the bandit possessed a deep-rooted acquaintance with western life, all the prairie noises were known to him as well as the paths were familiar : like him

again, he had made a particular study of Indian life and manners: in short, Brandard had encountered, if not his master, at least his equal. His self-love was excited and urged him to press on to the conclusion of this affair: so he resolved to conduct things so vigorously that, notwithstanding his cunning, Sutter would soon fall into his hands.

After having, as we have seen, quitted the high regions of the Sierra, the three men spread apart to seek some indication which would set them right to find the trail they had lost, for, according to that axiom of backwoodsmen, any *rastreador* (*trail-hunter*) who holds one end of a trail must infallibly reach the other end. Unfortunately not a mark or a print, was to be seen; Sutter's band had disappeared without it seeming possible to discover a trace of his passage.

Nevertheless Brandard was not disheartened; he studied the earth, inspected every blade of grass, beat all the bushes with a patience nothing could tire. Clarkson, less habituated than his uncle, seconded him to his best. Curumilla was as usual indefatigable, but all his attempts resulted the same way as those of Brandard's, that is stopping at a rock entirely bare. At this spot, it was folly to seek foot-marks, the granite would not keep them.

Here, Curumilla began to gather the dry leaves and broken branches to make a fire.

Brandard and his nephew leaned on their rifles, looking at tentively around.

In the place where the hunters had established their camping-ground was a naked rock on which grew no vegetation: an immense mastic-tree almost entirely shaded this place which its branches overtopped.

Brandard incessantly looked above and around, as if he had a presentiment that in this spot he would find the trail which he had lost. All at once he uttered a sonorous 'hem!' At this cry, a signal agreed upon between the Indian and himself, Curumilla stopped picking up the leaves, raised his head and looked up.

Brandard walked straight to him, followed by Clarkson.

'Have you discovered anything?' asked the latter.

'No,' returned Brandard, 'but it will not be long before I will.'

'Here?'

'Yes, this very spot, I see the tracks: believe me, nephew you will soon see as well.'

So saying the hunter stooped, gathered a handful of leaves and began examining them attentively.

‘What can you learn from those leaves?’ muttered Harry curiously.

‘Everything!’ responded Brandard continuing his examination.

Curumilla, bent over the ground, was looking at the rock to which Sutter had clung to keep down the limb of the tree into which his companions had climbed.

‘Ooah!’ said he.

The two others came to him.

The chief pointed to the rock, at the sides of which some earth was turned up and the stone itself was somewhat moved from its former position.

‘They have been here,’ said Brandard, ‘it is as clear as that two and two make four; the steps we have discovered, going from the place we are now on, are evident proofs.’

‘How’s that, uncle?’ asked the young man.

‘Nothing more simple; I will explain, as you seem to need a lesson in woodcraft. These footmarks which have deceived you cannot throw off an old backwoodsman like me: they are too irregular and hesitate, now to the left, now to the right: a proof they are false.’

‘False?’

‘Yes. This is what Sutter has done to conceal the direction he really pursued: he and his men marched fully two leagues backwards.’

‘You believe so?’

‘I am sure.’

‘But, supposing they did not come here, which I believe as well as you, now,’ observed the young man, ‘how is it that he has left no traces on the other side of this rock? Whatever care he may have used to hide them, you would find them.’

‘Perhaps; but there are none there, and it is only losing time to seek them. Sutter has been here, you acknowledge; but why has he come? you ask me that. For a good reason: on this granite marks will not stay; the bandit wished a fresh starting-point, and has led us to this place where he thinks to completely elude our searches. He has, to a certain point, succeeded: but he has been over-cunning and shot beyond the mark: before ten minutes, I will show you the trail as clear as if he had left guideposts along his way. Now, nephew, it is evident that Sutter was here?’

'Yes.

'Very well; since he was here, he must have gone farther,' said the hunter laughing, 'because if he staid here, we would have him already.'

'That is positive.'

'Good: now let us see how he went.'

'That is just what I don't see.'

'Because you are blind, or rather because you will not give yourself the trouble to look.'

'Oh, uncle, I swear.'

'I am wrong: it is because you do not understand what you see.'

'What?' cried Harry a little nettled by what he heard.

'You will agree with me in a moment, nephew,' said Brandard.

'I ask nothing better.'

'You shall see,' resumed he with that sort of condescension which is taken by persons who know a thing they are about to explain to another. 'The bandits were here and have disappeared. I come and I look, he has left no traces. He must, therefore, have used some path which a man may have taken; here, first of all, is a heap of leaves scattered on this rock, first indication.'

'How so?'

'That is quite clear; we are not in the season when leaves fall: they therefore did not fall of themselves.'

'Why not?'

'Because, if they had, they would be yellow and shrivelled up, while they are green, fresh and some, even, are torn, it is positive that they have been violently detached from the tree.'

'That is true,' murmured Clarkson almost convinced.

'Now, let us seek what was the unknown power which tore them from the tree.'

While saying this, Brandard had started off, his body bent towards the ground, in the direction of the trunk of the tree.

His nephew followed him closely.

Suddenly Brandard picked up a piece of bark half as large as one's hand and showed it to Clarkson.

'All is now explained,' said he. 'See this piece of bark, it is smoothed and rubbed as if it had been pressed by a rope, is it not?'

'Yes.'

'Well, don't you understand?'

‘ Not a whit more than I did a short time ago.’

‘ Listen,’ said he, ‘ Sutter came here ; with his lasso he caught that limb you see above our heads ; aided by his companions, the branch was bent. Then they mounted one after another ; Sutter, the last, no doubt, held the bough down by that rock ; he then let go and was lifted up by it, and they were all sixty or seventy feet from the ground ; that was very ingenious, you will agree ; but unfortunately leaves were broken off and, while untieing his lasso, a bit of bark fell ; he was pressed and could not destroy those accusing proofs, which we have seen and which I now read plainly.’

‘ You are every way right, uncle. So you believe this is the tree they climbed into ?’

‘ I will wager so. Moreover, you may soon be certain, for we will take the same road.’

‘ But can we do so ?’

‘ Easily. In these sort of woods, the road I speak of is the most practicable. Come, come, now that we have found again this trail to no more lose it, let us quickly breakfast and be off in the pursuit of those assassins.’

The hunters were not long at their meal, which was finished in a turn of the hand, and they were soon ready to start.

Brandard, to prove that his ideas were correct, employed to mount into the tree, the same means used by Sutter. The moment the three reached the branch, the truth of what Brandard had said was easily recognized ; traces of people having gone by were visible. They proceeded for a long ways guided by the broken twigs left by the bandits ; still, the farther they advanced, the more rare were such indications and soon they disappeared totally.

The trail was a second time lost.

Brandard stopped and motioning his nephew to him, said :

‘ Let us hold council.’

‘ I think,’ rejoined Harry, ‘ that Sutter has supposed his trail long enough in the trees and has descended.’

‘ Wrong again,’ said the old hunter shaking his head ; ‘ what you say is utterly impossible.’

‘ Why ?’

‘ Because the trail, as you see, stops over a lake.

‘ That is true.’

‘ Then it is evident that they would not drop into the water ? If we go forward, I wager we will once more find traces. that direction is the sole one Sutter can have followed. His

design must be to get through the Comanche lines which, we know, are thereaway; if he has turned back to the mountains, we know by experience, he will perish; he must be trying to escape by the only path left him, and that lies before us.'

'Must we still go from tree to tree,' inquired Harry.

'Yes. That is our road, it is there only we will find our foes.'

'Then let us start.'

Curumilla, following his custom, had said nothing; he had not even stopped to take part in the discussion; he continued to go on in advance.

'Ooah!' said he, suddenly.

The two white men ran eagerly to him.

The chief held in his hand a shred of fringe evidently from a hunting-frock, as large as a shilling.

'You see,' said Brandard, 'we are going right, we must not turn aside.'

This discovery made any discussion cease.

They had proceeded some way farther, when Brandard, who feared that they might be outnumbered by the bandits, deemed it but prudent to send Harry Clarkson to the Unicorn to give him information as to their whereabouts, but not to acquaint the sachem of their travelling in the trees, or the bandits, being repulsed by the numerous Comanches, might meet with Brandard and Curumilla in their flight and defeat the old hunter's design.

Harry descended from the tree, and went swiftly away to the Indian camp. He had entered it, met Delarue who confided in him his suspicions as to Nathan whom Clarkson, also doubted by the one look they had, exchanged at the border of the camp. Their united voice had made the Unicorn send the Spider to arrest Nathan, whose capture and escape we have previously recounted.

Brandard and the Indian proceeded onward for two hours, when night fell and all around became dark. At this moment Curumilla laid his hand on Brandard's arm.

'Well, Chief, what is it?' asked the latter.

'Listen,' returned the Indian.

Soon there came to the hunter's ear from a great distance confused cries, which, every instant, became more and more distinct, and soon changed into a frightful din.

'What can that be?' demanded Brandard, thoughtfully.

The yells augmented to fearful proportions, strange lights

illumined the forest, whose tenants, aroused of a sudden, stared with gleaming eyes on the two hunters.

‘Well,’ said Brandard, ‘I will try to find what this means.

Quitting then his shelter, he uttered a long shrill cry, to which horrid whoops replied.

‘It is the Unicorn,’ muttered he.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NATHAN IS WIPED OUT.

NATHAN’s flight had been discovered by a singular mishap.

The Comanches, no more than other Indians, have the habit of making patrols and rounds during the night, all these being the inventions of civilized people, wholly unknown on the prairie. In all probability the Indians would not have perceived till daybreak their prisoner’s disappearance.

Nathan depended on this. He was too well acquainted with Indian customs not to know it. But he had not calculated on hate, that vigilant sentinel, whose watchfulness is only to be equalled by love.

An hour after Nathan’s ascension into the trees, Clarkson, awakened by the cold, or more probably by the workings of his heart, which told him that one of those whom he had sworn to see die, having been seized, the others could not long escape their doom. He determined, for some unknown reason, one he could not define, to assure himself that the captive was securely bound and beyond the possibility of escape, and, alone, traversed the camp, leaping over the sleeping warriors; most of the fires had gone out, and those which still burned threw around but a dim light. Urged by that instinct of hate which rarely deceives those impelled by its compass, he had at length reached the tree to which the prisoner should have been attached.

The tree stood alone; the cords which had bound Nathan lay in scattered pieces at its foot.

Clarkson started back stupefied at the sight of what he was so far from expecting.

‘Oh,’ muttered he, in his rage, ‘they are a family of demons. How could he have escaped?’

He looked about him.

'These knaves still sleeping,' said he, seeing the prostrate guards, 'while the man they were charged to watch is far away laughing at us. They shall smart for this or there's no virtue in bowstrings.'

He spurned them with his foot.

'Dogs! sleepy rogues! up with you! the prisoner has escaped!'

The sleepers, or those who seemed such, made no movement.

'Oh,' said the young American, 'what's the meaning of this?'

He bent over and examined them, touching their faces which were clotted with coagulated gore; then all was revealed to him.

'Dead!' muttered he; 'he has assassinated them! What diabolical power can shield them from our avenging hands?'

He rose hastily and rushed through the camp shouting!

'To arms, warriors, to arms! The prisoner has flown.'

All was immediately in tumult. The Unicorn, one of the first, came with Delarue to ask the cause of Harry's cries.

A very few words served to tell them all, and the Unicorn, more furious than the white men, sent off warriors in every direction in pursuit of Nathan. We know that provisionally at least, the bandit had nothing to fear from the hopeless search.

This miraculous flight of a bound man from the midst of a camp full of warriors, without being seen by the sentinels, had in it something so extraordinary that the Comanches, superstitious like all Indians, were not far from believing in the intervention of the Spirit of Evil.

The whole camp was turned upside down; every one ran in different directions brandishing torches. The circle enlarged every moment, the warriors, borne by their enthusiasm, had quitted the clearing to enter the forest.

Suddenly a shrill cry came through the space.

Every one stopped as if by enchantment.

The Unicorn then yelled forth an answer, the last notes of which the Comanches repeated.

'Brandard! my brother!' said the Unicorn.

'Uncle!' said Clarkson. 'Let us run to meet him.'

The Canadian and Harry ran with a dozen warriors and soon arrived beneath the tree in which we left Brandard and Curumilla. The hunter saw them come; when they were near him, he called.

'Where are you?' asked the Unicorn.

'In this mesquito tree,' returned Brandard; 'stop and look up.'

The Indians raised their heads.

'Ooah!' said the Unicorn in surprise; 'what does my brother mean?'

'I will tell you, but help me first to descend; it is not a suitable place for a council.'

'Good; I await my brother.'

Brandard fastened his lasso to a branch and lowered the end preparatory to going down.

Curumilla laid his hand on his shoulder.

'What do you want, chief?' asked the old hunter.

'Is my brother going down?' returned the Indian.

'You see,' replied Brandard shaking the lasso.

Curumilla shook his head.

'Our men are there,' said he pointing.

'True?' exclaimed the hunter striking his forehead, 'I forgot all about them—am I losing my senses? Chief, you are a precious friend, nothing escapes you—stay!'

He bent down and making a kind of speaking-trumpet with his hands, cried.

'Chief!'

'What would my brother?' responded the Unicorn.

'Come up. You, Harry and your friend.'

The sachem grasped the lasso, and was followed by Delarue and Clarkson. They all three were soon on the branch where stood Brandard and Curumilla.

'What, you here, Bill?' said the old hunter shaking Delarue's hand.

'Here I am!' said the Unicorn.

'Why are you running about the forest at this time of night?' asked the hunter.

The sachem explained in a few words what had happened.

Brandard frowned. In his turn he informed the chief of what he had done.

'It is evident,' said he, 'that those whom we seek are not far from here; perhaps they hear us.'

'It's likely,' said the Unicorn; 'what will we do on so dark a night?'

'Let us be as cunning as they. How many warriors have you below?'

'Ten, I believe.'

'Tis well. Among them, have you not some one you can depend on.'

‘All!’ replied the sachem proudly.

‘I do not speak of courage, but of experience?’

‘Ooah! I have the Spider.’

‘That’s our man. He will replace us with your warriors, whose command you can give him; he will cut off communications here, while I and my companions follow you. I will not be sorry to visit the place your prisoner escaped from.’

All things were executed as Brandard desired.

The Spider established himself in the trees with the order to watch attentively; Brandard, sure henceforward to have raised a barrier against Sutter and his band which they could not overcome, prepared to return to the camp in company with the Unicorn.

Curumilla again interposed.

‘Why descend?’ said he.

The old hunter so well knew the Indian, that he understood his single word.

‘Right once more,’ said he turning to the Unicorn, ‘let us go to your camp, by passing from branch to branch. Curumilla is right; in this way, if our foes are concealed in the neighbourhood, we may discover them.’

The Sachem of the Comanches bowed his plumed head in token of assent, and they set out.

They had been half-an-hour or thereabouts, when Curumilla, who led the party, stopped with a low cry.

The hunters raised their heads and saw above them, an enormous black mass which was swinging lazily on a limb.

‘Ah!’ said Delarue starting, ‘what is that?’

‘A bear,’ replied Curumilla.

‘Indeed,’ said Clarkson, ‘it is a magnificent black bear. Let us shoot him.’

‘Take heed,’ cried the Unicorn, ‘a gunshot may give an alarm to those we are seeking.’

‘I wish I could shoot him,’ said Brandard, ‘were it but for his fur.’

‘No,’ said the Unicorn peremptorily: ‘the bears are the good cousins of my family.’

‘Then, that is different,’ said the hunter, scarcely concealing an ironical smile.

The Indians, we think we have stated so before, are excessively superstitious. Among other beliefs, they have that of believing they are descended from certain animals whom they treat as parents and for whom they profess a deep respect;

which does not prevent them slaying them on the occasion when, as often happens, they are impelled by hunger ; but this justice should be rendered the Indians that they do not arrive to that extremity towards their so-called parents without craving a thousand pardons of them and having first explained that hunger alone obliged them to have recourse to this extreme means to sustain their existence.

The Unicorn had no need of food at this moment, his camp was overflowing with provisions ; so he showed to his cousin the bear, a politeness and gallantry worthy of eulogy. He saluted him, spoke some minutes in the most affectionate manner, while the bear continued to swing himself indolently without appearing to attach any great importance to the chief's discourse, and seemed more annoyed than flattered by the compliments his cousin addressed him.

The sachem, internally nettled by this bad taste and indifference, made the bear a last sign of farewell and passed on.

The little troop advanced some time in silence.

'I do not know why,' said Brandard suddenly, 'but I wish I had the skin of your cousin, chief.'

'Ooah !' responded the Unicorn, 'there is much buffalo at the camp.'

'I know that,' said the hunter : 'it is not for that.'

'What then ?'

'I do not know, but that bear had a suspicious air to me, he appears to me a counterfeit.'

'Does my brother believe that the Unicorn is a child who cannot recognize animals ?' said the sachem warmly.

'Heaven preserve me from having such a thought, chief ! I know you are an experienced warrior ; but the most cunning may be deceived.'

'Oh, oh, what does my father suppose ?'

'Would you boldly hear my mind ?'

'Yes, let my brother speak ; he is a great hunter, his knowledge is immense.'

'No, I am but ignorant, but still I have studied the habits of beasts.'

'Well,' said Delarue, 'your opinion is that that bear——'

'Is Sutter or one of his men,' interposed Brandard.

'What makes you suppose that ?'

'This first : at this hour animals go to the nearest lake or pond to drink, but supposing that this one has returned, do you not know that all animals fly before man : this one, dazzled by

the torches, frightened by cries which he never has heard in the usually silent forest, should have, if he followed his instinct, tried to save himself, which was extremely easy, instead of carelessly dancing before us, a hundred feet in the air; so much the more as the bear is an animal too prudent and selfish to entrust his dear and precious body in that way to branches too weak to support him: the more I reflect, the more I am persuaded that it was a man in disguise.'

The hunters and the Unicorn himself, who had listened with the greatest attention to the American's words, were struck by the truthfulness of his observations; a thousand details which had escaped them, now were presented to their memory and came to corroborate the American's suspicions.

'For my part,' said Delarue, 'I am far from disbelieving it.'

'You can understand,' said Brandard, 'how on so dark a night, the chief, notwithstanding all his experience, was deceived, especially at a distance like that we were from the pretended animal: still we have committed a grave fault, and I the first of all, to leave him without acquiring a certainty.'

'Ah!' said the sachem, 'my brother is right, wisdom dwells in him.'

'Now it is too late to retrace our paces, the deceiver has decamped by this time,' said Brandard: 'but; added he looking around him, 'where is Curumilla?'

Like a reply to his question, came to the spot where they were, a loud noise of breaking branches followed by a stifled cry.

'Halloa!' said Brandard, 'we will have news of our friend.' Suddenly the cawing of a crow was heard.

'That is Curumilla's signal,' said Brandard, 'what has he been up to?'

'We must learn, and to do that go back,' observed Delarue.

'Do you believe I would leave my old friend?' exclaimed Brandard replying to the Indian's signal by a caw like the one they had heard.

'Let us go back,' said Clarkson.

The hunters retraced their steps as quickly as the nature of the narrow and dangerous path would permit.

Curumilla, seated commodiously in a leafy covert in the midst of which he was perfectly invisible to whomsoever might have been looking from above him, was silently laughing all alone. So extraordinary a thing was it to see Curumilla laugh,

the hour was apparently so unusual a one, that Brandard was alarmed and was not far from believing that his old companion had suddenly become mad.

‘Well, chief,’ said he looking on all sides, ‘will you tell me why you are laughing this way ? I shall not be sorry to learn the cause of your great glee, that we may all laugh in company.’

Curumilla fixed on his friend his intelligent eye and replied with a goodhumored smile :

‘The chief laughs because he is contented.’

‘I see that,’ returned Brandard ; ‘only I am ignorant why, and wish to know.’

‘Curumilla has killed the bear,’ said the Indian sententiously.

‘Bah !’ said the old hunter in astonishment.

‘Look, brother, there is the sachem’s cousin.’

The Unicorn frowned.

Brandard and his friends looked in the direction designated.

Curumilla’s lasso, firmly fastened to the bough of the tree they were standing on, hung in the space ; at its end dangled a strangely shaped black mass.

It was the bear’s body.

Curumilla, during the Unicorn’s conversation with his relation, had attentively spied the animal’s motions ; the same as Brandard, those movements had not appeared sufficiently natural to him and he had wished to know all ; consequently he had let his friends depart, had attached his lasso to a strong branch, and while the bear, believing all his visitors gone, had unsuspectingly descended from his perch, the Indian had lassoed him. On this unforeseen attack the animal had missed his footing, had fallen and remained swinging in the air, thanks to the running noose which encircled his neck, which had preserved the animal’s bones from being broken, albeit, by way of compensation, it had strangled him.

The hunters began pulling the lasso to them ; they burned to know if they wore wrong. After some efforts, the bear was extended on the branch.

Brandard bent quickly over it, but as quickly rose, saying scornfully :

‘I was sure.’

He gave a kick at the animal’s head which flew off, leaving in its place Nathan’s visage, whose violet features were horribly contracted.

'Oh!' cried they all, Nathan!

'Yes,' added Brandard, 'Sutter's elder son.'

'One!' said Harry Clarkson, pulling a small bag from his breast, and dipping it in the bloody foam on the dead man's lips.

Poor Nathan was not fortunate in disguises; with the first, he had barely escaped being burned alive; with the second, he had been hanged.

The hunters remained for an instant silent, their eyes fixed on their enemy's corpse.

The Unicorn, who no doubt was angry at having been deceived by his passing himself for his cousin, broke the species of charm which enchain'd the lookers on by unsheathing his scalping-knife, and relieving the poor American of his thick hair.

'It is the scalp of one of those long knife dogs,' said he, attaching his bleeding trophy to his waist. 'His serpent's tongue will deceive no longer.'

Brandard was profoundly reflecting.

'What have we now to do?' inquired Delarue.

'Do!' cried Harry Clarkson, 'that is not difficult to guess. we must immediately retake our pursuit of Sutter.'

'What says my brother?' asked the Unicorn turning with deference to Brandard.

The latter raised his head.

'All is finished for to-night,' replied he, 'yon carrion was charged to amuse us while his friends took to flight. To pursue them at this moment would be signal folly; they have too much advance to be overtaken: the night is so black that we would have to station a warrior in every tree. Let us content ourselves for the present with keeping the sentinel's the way they are. At daybreak, the council of the tribe will unite and decide on the means to be employed.'

Every one was of the hunter's way of thinking. They took the march to the camp, which they reached in an hour.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BANDIT'S LAST REFUGE.

We must at present return to Sutter.

When the bandit had heard the cries of the Indians and had seen the reddish glare of the torches flash through the trees, he had at first believed he was lost and had sat down on a branch hiding his face in his hands in despair. But the bandit's discouragement had no longer duration than the lightning's flash, almost instantly he rose, as intrepid and defiant as before, crying in a firm voice:

'Forward!'

'I, for one, will not obey a madman,' said Simon Munez.

'Am I not your leader?' thundered Sutter, enforcing his words with a blow from his fist which sent the luckless Mexican staggering towards an opening, through which he would have fallen to the ground, had not Dog'sface and Richard Sutter caught him in their arms. Foaming at the mouth with rage, the Mexican drew his knife and made a spring at Sutter who calmly awaited him. The weapon however, was taken from Munez, who when released followed the party, muttering threats to which no great importance was attached.

The bandit leader now marched resolutely to the camp. Soon they reached the spot where they had let down the lasso to Nathan.

Sutter parted the branches and looked through.

The whole camp was in commotion: the savages were to be seen running hither and thither in every direction.

'Oh,' muttered Sutter, 'I hope those red devils will all be off in our pursuit; we cannot pass here without.'

'We must not think of such a thing,' said Nathan, 'we would be wholly lost.'

'Time passes; we must take some part,' said Pepito Rosario.

'Silence,' said Sutter, 'where is Nathan; has he left us to ourselves?

'Not so, father,' said the young man's voice, 'he has only changed his dress.'

He put aside the leaves which hid him; his companions uttered a cry of astonishment.

Nathan was covered with a bearskin, all but the head, which he held in his hand.

'Oh, oh,' said Sutter, 'that's a lucky windfall; where did you steal that, Nathan?'

'I only had the trouble to lift it off the branch where they put it to dry.'

'Keep it carefully, for it may come of use.'

'That's what I thought.'

'Come, let us start.'

They had gone but a few steps when Sutter stopped, held out his hand to caution his companions and listened. After two or three minutes' time, he turned and, bending close to them, said in a whisper:

'Our retreat is cut off, some one is moving in the trees, I hear rustling of leaves and snapping of twigs.'

They looked about in affright.

'Do not despair,' resumed he quickly, 'all is not yet lost; go up higher in the tree and let us wait till they pass, while Nathan amuses them; the Comanches usually do no harm to bears, whom they call relations.'

No one made any objection.

Richard went on first, followed by Dog'sface and Rosario, after whom came Munez, whose attention was divided between stanching the blood which streamed from a cut on his forehead made by Sutter's blow, and picking his way cautiously.

Then the old bandit grasped with one hand the branches above his head and disappeared in the foliage, saying:

'Take care of yourself, Nat, my boy: play your part well, our safety depends on you.'

'Be easy, father,' responded the young man, putting on the bear's head, 'I am not so stupid as an Indian: they cannot but help take me for their parent.'

Our readers know what occurred, how this stratagem, at first so successful, was foiled by Curumilla.

On seeing the hanging of his son, the bandit was blinded with rage and lifting his rifle to his shoulder, took aim at the Indian.

'What are you doing,' said the Spaniard knocking up the gunbarrel: 'you will only lose us all without saving him.'

'True,' muttered the bandit.

The fugitives remained for an hour in the trees without daring to stir hand or foot, from fear of being discovered. They were so near their pursuers that they heard every word they uttered. By degrees the voices sounded less and less distinct, the torchlight was not so vivid, and all fell back again into silence.

'They are gone,' said the Spaniard breathing.

'Not all,' said the bandit; 'did you not hear that confounded American telling the chief to post sentinels?'

'That is true, our retreat is cut off.'

'Do not give up, yet, wholly; we can stay here and rest'

without fear of discovery ; let you do so while I go out on the discovery ?

The American left the party. During his absence, not a word was spoken : the Spaniard was thinking, Richard Sutter was standing as sentinel over Munez and Dog's-face who slept.

In about an hour, Sutter returned, with a smiling face.

' Well ?' queried the Spaniard anxiously.

' Good news !' replied the other ; ' I have discovered a refuge where I defy a bloodhound to follow ?'

' Far from here ?'

' Barely two yards.'

' So near ?'

' Therein lies our security ; our enemies will never suppose that we have the audacity to hide ourselves so near them.'

' Right ; let us go.'

' When you please.'

' Right away then.'

Sutter had not lied, he had indeed discovered a refuge which offered every desirable security ; if we ourselves had not seen a similar one in the Western prairies, we would scarcely attach faith to a statement of such a retreat.

After having gone some few yards, the leader stopped above an enormous oaktree, dead of old age and completely hollow.

' This is it,' said he cautiously parting the leafy screen of lianas and branches which completely concealed the cavity.

' Oh !' cried the bandits in joy.

' How did you find out ?' asked Rosario.

' I knew it long ago,' returned Sutter.

' Ah, but,' continued the Spaniard, ' if you know it, may not others know it also ?'

' No,' replied the other shaking his head ; one man only beside myself knew it, and the discovery cost him his life.'

' That reassuses me.'

' Neither hunter nor trapper comes ever by here, it is a precipice ; if we should go a few steps more in this direction we should find ourselves suspended over an abyss of imfathomable depth, one of whose walls this mountain forms.'

' We will be better there than here,' returned Rosario, who without hesitation, slipped into the hollow where he disappeared from sight. The others, except Sutter, did the same.

The old bandit, remaining alone, with minute care made all the traces disappear which might have revealed to his clear-

sighted enemies the road he had taken; then, when he was certain that nothing was left to point out their retreat, he also slipped down the hole.

The bandits, first care was to explore their domicile. It was immense. The cavern went to a considerable depth beneath the mountain. It was divided into many branches and levels, some of which went upward almost to the summit of the mountain, while others were under ground; a subterranean lake, the reservoir of a nameless river, extended in a low vault whose humid walls and roof were black with bats. This cavern had many entrances in diametrically opposite directions; these openings were so well hidden by nature's artful hand that it was impossible for them to be perceived from without.

One thing only troubled the adventurers, that was the possibility of finding food; but to that Sutter replied that it would be each man's duty, day and day around, to set traps and hunt.

After supper, save Munez and Richard Sutter, who were chosen sentinels, all sought that repose for which their exertions called so earnestly.

Days passed, and nothing worthy of record occurred till the day when Simon Munez was selected to go from the cave and hunt. The worthy Mexican had not forgotten the blow Sutter had struck him and took advantage of this opportunity to take his revenge. Instead of going to the traps, he kept close to the mountain, going around it and then striking off in the direction of the Comanche camp. His reason for such a proceeding we shall see.

* * * * * *

Three or four days were occupied by the hunters in seeking the bandits' trail which they now seemed to have lost beyond recovery. Leaving Brandard and Curumilla in the camp, Clarkson with Delarue, started on the fourth morning to make an independent search, in the belief that the noise of the large band of Indians they had had before was the cause of their not discovering the pursued.

Mounted on two magnificent mustangs, bestowed on them by the Unicorn, the two men were riding slowly and silently along. For many hours they had gone thus, when of a sudden both reined in their horses at the same time. They had seen a man half bent, seated at the foot of a tree, apparently absorbed in some occupation which the new-comers could not make out.

Spurring their horses together they rode up to him, when they stopped uttering a cry of astonishment. The man was Simon Munez, who was playing all alone at monte, with a greasy pack of cards. The sight appeared so ludicrous that, though he was an enemy, they burst out into laughter.

At this sound, Simon lifted up his head.

‘ See now,’ said he appearing no way disconcerted: ‘ I was sure some one would come: that was something that never failed on this blessed earth !’

‘ What do you mean, sirrah ?’ said Clarkson, ‘ explain your self—no jesting with us.’

‘ Well, will you let me tell my story as I please ?’

Delarue drew Clarkson aside and, still keeping an eye on Munez who, however, did not seem desirous of flying, said :

‘ Harry, this man perhaps has quarrelled with his friends and may by threats or pay be made to give the very intelligence we are in search of. Listen to him, I pray you.’

Harry Clarkson turned to the Mexican, saying :

‘ Go on, then, but if you waste our time, look you, my master, there are Indians within call who will treat you as they were near treating your friend, Nathan.’

‘ Oh, I know, burnt alive or some like pleasantry, which I will willingly undergo, if what I state does not come of use to you.’

‘ Enough, we’ll hear you, but if you make an attempt at escape——’ the young man touched his pistol butt significantly.

‘ That is my last intention. Well, you must first learn, I have been in Jalapa, a city you may have heard of. You must know that we have there a saying, to wit; “ would you have company ? play cards.” ’

‘ Well, you have the company Proceed.’

‘ It is more than I asked for ; I only thought some one would come, who would lead me to the persons I sought, and, lo ! the very ones I needed are here.’

‘ How is it,’ asked Delarue, ‘ that you have left Sutter ?’

‘ Caramba !’ cried the gambusino, ‘ say that he left me, or was the cause of my leaving ?’

‘ How so ?’

Without answering, the Mexican lifted up his sombrero and showed a bloodstained bandage which covered his eye and cheek.

‘ Who did that ? Sutter ?’

‘ Yes, and I wish to revenge myself. Alone I am too weak

—well too cowardly, if you like—let us not mince the word. So I seek you.'

' You have done right, then. Do you only ask immunity for yourself ?'

' That is all.'

' Come, follow us ; in an hour you will see my uncle.'

As Harry had said, they encountered Brandard, near the Comanche camp.

' Where are your companions ?' asked the old hunter.

' Sutter and the rest are concealed in the mountains, in a cavern, which I defy you to find without my assistance.'

' That assistance you have promised us. Will you do as we order ?'

' Yes.'

' Well, you must return, and take with you Delarue and Clarkson, one of whom will come to warn us of the right moment for attack.'

' Very well. I will do so. We will start as soon as you please.'

' Instantly, then,' cried the two men, ' our horses are still fresh.'

A mustang was given to Munez who, with the two hunters, rapidly left the camp and rode off in the direction of the mountains.

They galloped silently, Simon riding a little in advance.

In the stace of mind of our three characters, too deep in their thoughts, the other nursing his revengeful designs, our readers will have seen that any conversation was impossible.

They reached the first elevation of the mountains without having exchanged a word. There, they stopped.

' Caballeros,' said the traitor, ' before going farther, it will do no harm, it seems to me, to make some indispensable changes '

' Of what changes do you speak, my friend,' asked Harry.

' We are about to enter,' resumed Simon, ' regions where horses cannot but be more hurtful than useful ; in these mountains, a man on foot can go where a mounted man cannot.'

' Right, let us leave our horses here ; they will not wander farther than the necessary space to find their nourishment. When we have need of them we are sure to find them here.'

' Then let us dismount ; take saddles and *bossals* off the horses and let us abandon them to their instinct.'

The three men dismounted, took the harness from their horses

and drove them away. The noble beasts, accustomed to this mode of acting, went off a few paces and commenced to quietly crop the prairie grass.

The trappings of the three steeds were deposited in the hollow of a tree designated by the Mexican, and so well covered with dead leaves that it was impossible to suspect their concealment.

Our three men had quitted Brandard somewhat late in the day ; by the time they had hidden their horses' harness, and reached the narrow platform of rock, the night had completely come on.

'Now,' said Munez, 'I am ready to play my part. Look yonder.'

'Oh, oh, what is that,' said Clarkson turning his eyes in the designated direction.

A thin thread of white smoke seemed to ascend from the rock a short distance from them.

'There is no smoke without fire,' returned Simon Munez laughing. 'Are you convinced that I have led you to the tiger's den ?'

'Yes,' said they both together.

'Now one of you must go to your camp, and surround this mountain. It has many entrances, which I will point out to whichever of you is going for your friends.'

'Well,' said Delarue and Clarkson, 'we will both go.'

'So be it. But let one of you leave me his hat.'

'Willingly ; but you have one.'

'I have need of a second.'

'Here's mine, then.'

'That will do. By the bye, if you hear any sound towards morning, a shot or two, do not mind it.'

'I will not.' After throwing his fur-cap which was adorned with a fox's tail in lieu of feather, Clarkson shouldered his rifle, and soon he and Delarue were beyond the sight of the gambusino, who, wrapping himself up in his blanket, fell quietly asleep.

The first beams of the morning sun had barely dissipated the damp mist which hung upon the gray rocks, then Munez sprang to his feet.

After a glance around to be assured that he was alone, he took up Harry Clarkson's cap and threw it down the precipice near by. After having whirled in the air several times, it finally settled on a jutting rock some distance below.

'Good?' muttered the gambusino, 'there's something that will verify my tale.'

He then seated himself; took his rifle and discharged it in the air; immediately seizing one of the pistols in his guard, he held out his left arm and the ball went through the fleshy part of it.

'Caramba!' said he, falling flat on the ground, 'I am afraid I have gone a little too far.'

Some minutes passed without any thing troubling the silence. Then two men appeared on the scene, looking carefully about.

Simon Munez opened his eyes. The two men were old Sutter and his son Richard.

'It is Munez,' said the latter.

'Yes, I will explain my hurt, but now take me to the cave, which I believe is not known to them.'

'Who? what mean you?'

'The Comanches—the white hunters—one of their scouts fired at me, but he is not now in a condition to do harm to any one.'

'Have you killed him?' queried the old bandit.

'I don't know. Look down there, you will see his body.'

The two men bent over the rock.

'I see a hat, the body cannot be far off.'

'Unless it has rolled down to the bottom of the rock,' said Simon.

'That is likely enough,' returned Richard Sutter, 'the rock is almost straight up and down.'

'Oh, *nuestra senora!* how I suffer,' moaned the gambusino, rising and staggering a few paces, when he fell.

'We must get back to the cave,' said old Sutter, 'and I will carry you on my back, you're not very heavy.'

Ten minutes afterward, Simon Munez was in the grotto before a fire, overwhelmed with questions on his delay, which he plausibly answered to the effect that, seeing the country was full of Indians, he had spent all the preceding day in making false trails, and in returning to warn his comrades, he had encountered an enemy near the cave who had wounded him, as they might see, and whom he had shot and thrown down the precipice.

The sight of Clarkson's hat had made the only suspicions of old Sutter disappear. The others, who knew Munez to have been always one of them, distrusted him not in the least.

After breakfast, all passed as usual when all of a sudden Dog's-face came running in, rifle in hand.

'To arms ! to arms !' cried he, 'the enemy are in sight !'

At the same time Richard Sutter made his appearance, shouting:

'To arms !'

This strange coincidence of two attacks made at the same time, gave much reflection for old Sutter.

'We are betrayed !' said he.

'By whom ?' demanded the gambusino boldly.

'By you perhaps ?' responded the bandit in anger.

Simon laughed.

'You are mad,' returned he, 'you are out of your head with the approach of danger.'

'I'll swear some one has betrayed us !' cried the old bandit, raging like a caged bear who sees his prey near him but cannot reach it on account of the intervening bars.

'Instead of railing at me,' said Simon with a well-assumed accent of wounded dignity, 'you had better fly. You shall see if I am a traitor, for here I shall stay and sustain the retreat.'

'You will do that ?'

'I will !'

'You are a man, then, whom I am sorry to have wronged.'

At this moment, the ear-piercing war-whoop of the Comanches rang through the rocky vaults, seeming to find many an echo in different quarters.

Leaving Munez seated on a block of stone, the four bandits disappeared in the depths of the subterranean.

Simon sprang up and bounded in their pursuit, followed by some twenty Comanche warriors, at the head of whom was the Unicorn and the Spider. The bandits had not gone twenty yards than they were received by a discharge of rifles from Clarkson, Bandard and Delarue who, with some Indians were guarding an issue which Sutter had thought known only to himself.

The bandits placed themselves back to back, shielding themselves with the blocks of rock, thus avoiding the bullets, while their shots, aimed at the compact body of their enemies, almost always struck the mark.

'Will you surrender ?' shouted the old hunter to the bandits.

'Let this be our answer—fire, men !' returned Sutter in a clear voice.

Then the combat recommenced. A few Comanches were posted to fire over the heads of their friends, who rushed forward with lassoes. There was an outburst of flame, an overpowering odor of powder, and the yells, shouts, shrieks of pain and groans blended in one last chaos of confusion.

Torches were brought, and three men were then seen bound hand and foot with lassoes: they were Sutter, his son and Rosario. Dog's-face was writhing on the floor in the last agon caused by a mortal wound and the pain of being scalped alive, as he had been by the Spider. Sutter was shot in two places, by Simon Munez who had in turn received a blow from the old bandit's rifle which left him in no state to rejoice at his triumph. Rosario and Richard Sutter had received no serious wounds.

But their assailants had not won their victory unscathed. Brandard was in one corner, with eyes half closed, propped up against a rock, cared for by his nephew and Curumilla, who brought all his knowledge in leechcraft, which few hunters are deficient in, to bear against the wound, which a tyro would have pronounced mortal. Clarkson's left hand was deficient in two fingers, and a cut was on his cheek. Delarue had been killed in this attack, though his had been the hand which struck down Dog'sface.

A solemn scene was that presented by the group in that cave whose stalactites reflected the lurid glare of the torches held by the Indians. Brandard died blessing his nephew, giving his rifle to Clarkson, his other equipments to the Comanche chieftains who took them with a reverence which showed how much they esteemed the old hunter adopted by their tribe. With one pressure of the still warm hand of Delarue, a look around on the bandits whom he no doubt forgave at this moment, the old hunter breathed a sigh and expired so quietly that his peaceful death seemed to have been given him as amends for his troublous existence.

* * * * *

FOUR days after the events recorded in the foregoing chapter, the Unicorn's camp presented a strange aspect. Not only did it inclose all the Indian warriors belonging to the nations allied to the Comanches, but also many white hunters and trappers who came to see the punishment inflicted on men who had been the scourge of the prairies, the terror of the wilderness.

The trial lasted a whole day. Many were the accusers, and from stealing of traps to killing of defenceless men, white and

red, not a crime seemed known but that these men had been guilty of.

Clarkson, appointed judge against his will, was forced to give the sentences. After consulting the chiefs and white hunters said : ' John Sutter, you are condemned to be scalped and then hung. What say the people ?'

' Right !' cried they all in one voice.

Richard Sutter was condemned to be hung only.

Rosario's turn came.

' You are condemned,' continued Clarkson, ' to be hanged —'

' Hanged only,' said the Spaniard, sneering. ' Oh, merciful Judge Lynch ! merciful, for you kill me but once, I who have been a scalp hunter, have burned wigwams as well as white men's houses. I have robbed, murdered, done the most horrid crimes you can invent. I scorn you all, you are cowards, you feared to let us fight it out in the cave, where you overpowered us with numbers.'

' You are condemned,' said Clarkson after consultation, ' to be scalped, hanged by the armpits, besmeared with honey and remain so hanging until the bees and the birds of heaven devour you !'

* * * * *

Sutter and his son did not suffer long. He who underwent a torture beyond comparison was Rosario ; he writhed for twenty-four hours in unspeakable agony before death put an end to his suffering.

As soon as he had seen the execution of Sutter, Simon Munoz departed, where no one knows.

Brandard and Delarue were buried in the same grave, all the Indian warriors assisting in the ceremony. When every one had gone away Clarkson kneeled by the grave, where he was found in the morning by the faithful Curumilla, with his hair, black the previous evening, turned to gray.

' Alas !' murmured the young man, ' what remains to me ?'

' The Great Spirit and the desert !' said Curumilla extending his arm towards the rising orb of day

The hunter's eye was lit up ; he shook his head, cast a last look at the grave, saying, ' Farewell, friends,' and turning to the Indian, added : ' Let us go.'

Clarkson entered upon a new existence.

THE END.

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The vacation escapade. Four boys and teacher.
That naughty boy. Three females and a male.
Mad-cap. An acting charade.
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	The national flag,		My uncle Adolphus.
	Our true future,		

DIME SCHOOL SPEAKER, No. 13.

POPULAR ORATOR.	On keeping at it,	The dread secret,	The midnight train,
My Butterfly's ball,	The treasures of the deep,	Civil service reform,	The better view,
Topics uncongenial to greatness,	Keep cool,	The true gentleman,	Do thy little—do it well,
Live for something,	The precious freight,	The tragic pa.	Jesus forever,
Civil and religious liberty,	A sketch,	SABBATH SCHOOL PIECES	The heart,
Second review of the grand army,	The sword the true arbiter,	A cry for life,	The world,
Dishonesty of politics,	Aristocracy,	The sabbath,	Beautiful thoughts,
The great commoner,	Baron Grimalkin's death	Gnarled lives,	A picture of life,
Character and achievement,	Obed Snipkins,	A good life,	Be true to yourself,
"I can't,"	A catastrophe,	To whom shall we give thanks!	young man,
"It might have been,"	Cheerfulness,	Resolution,	Time is passing,
Don't strike a man when down,	Mountains,	Never mind,	The gospel of autumn,
	The last lay of the Minstrel,	The Bible,	Speak not harshly,
	The unlucky lovers,	Christianity our bulwark,	Courage,
		The want of the hour,	The eternal hymn,
			Live for good,
			The silent city.

DIME DIALECT SPEAKER, No. 23.

Dave wat's de matter, The Mississippi miracle, Ven te tide cooms in, Dose lamis yet Mary has got,	All about a bee, Scandal, A dark side view, Te pesser way, On learning German,	Latest Chinese outrage, The manifest destiny of the Irishman, Peggy McCann, Sprays from Josh Bil-	My neighbor's dog, Condensed Mythology, Pictus, The Nereides, Legends of Attica,
Pat O'Flaherty on wo- man's rights, The home rulers, how they "spakes,"	Mary's shmall vite lamb A healthy discourse, Tobias so to speak, Old Mrs. Grimes,	lings, De circumstances ob de sitiuation, Dar's nuffin new under de sun,	The stove-pipe tragedy, A deketer's drubbles, The coming man, The illigant affair at Muldeon's,
Hezekiah Dawson on Mothers-in-law, He didn't sell the farm, The true story of Frank- lin's kide,	parody, Mars and cats, Bill Underwood, pilot, Old Granley,	A Negro religious poem, That violin, Picnic delights, Our exandidate's views,	That little baby round the corner, A genewine inference, An invitation to the bird of liberty,
I would I were a bey again, A pathetic story,	The pill peddler's ora- tion, Widder Green's last words,	Dundreary's wisdom, Plain language by truth- ful Jane,	The crow, Out west.

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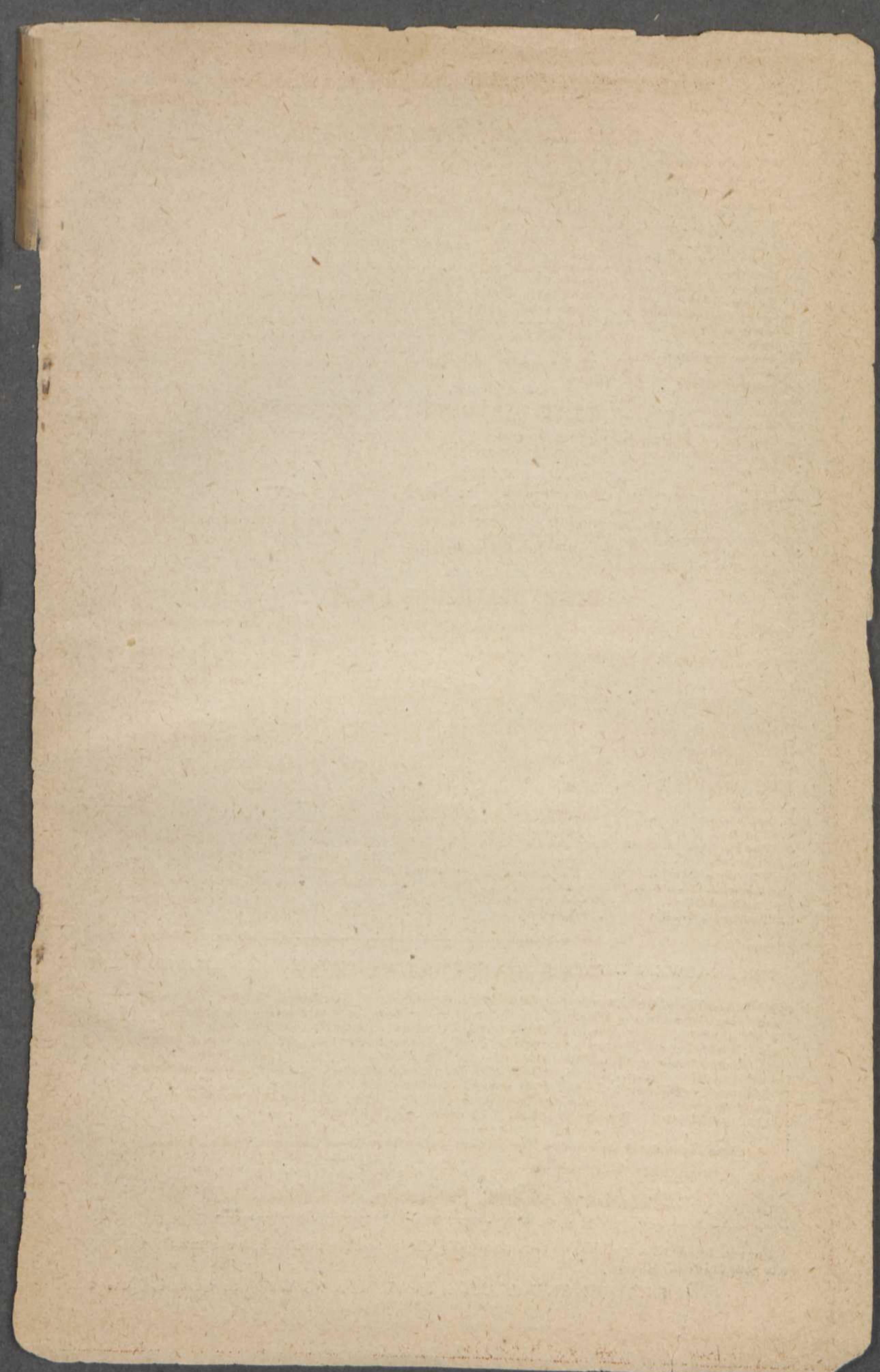
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